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ONE OF US

A NOVEL IN VERSE

BY GILBERT FRANKAU

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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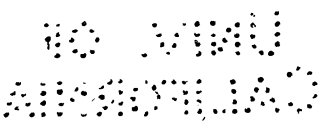

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

DEDICATION

To every fellow-poetasting swanker,
  To each and all of that Pierian caucus
Amidst whose choirs my virgin harpstrings hanker
  To raise some tintinnabulation raucous;
To soulful chemist and to Laureate banker,
  To bards in Oklahoma and in Orcus,
To Baudelaire, d'Annunzio and Heine,
To penny- and to thousand-pound-a-liner;

To Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Homer, Pope,
  To Seaman, Swinburne, Camoëns and Shelley
To him who first in advertising trope
  Extolled the virtues of an oxine jelly,
To Milton, Alfred Austin, Laurence Hope,
  To Dante Alighieri and Corelli:
I dedicate my primal epic poem
In the preluding of this humble proem.

479169

But Byron, most to thee, than whom no rarer
Spirit is found upon Elysium's plain!
To-day, none know thy 'Childe' and none thy
'Lara,'
Thy Hebrews are melodious in vain;
For many mark the falling price of Para,
Yet none the fall of Parisina slain,
Save only I, what hour, to midnight's chiming,
I search thy cantos for forgotten rhyming.

Maestro! hast thou used them all? hast toyed
With every sound that rolls a stanza fleeter?
Must I—whose songs on stronger wings are buoyed,
Sounder of technique, and in scansion sweeter—
Outstretch these hands across the sundering void
To rape once more the magic of that metre
Which thou, combining *utile cum dulci*,
Did'st bone from my lamented *confrère* Pulci?

Why not? Since in my mouth the gods renew
The fires that came with thee, and with thee fled.
Why not? A century divides us—true—
The scornful living from the scornful dead:
And now my many trample on thy few,
My Turkey bleedeth in thy Greece's stead;
My tippler and my Jacobin betray
The land thou counted'st cursed with Castlereagh . . .

But what's a hundred winters, more or less ?
  Fate gives the same old cards another shuffle :
Thy Scotch reviewers are my Yellow Press,
  My pleated shirtfront is thy Mechlin ruffle ;
My Suffragettes, thy ' Blues ' in modern dress ;
  Thy waltzers crave my double Boston's scuffle ;
My Don Juans are Gunners, Guards, or Sappers ;
Their Julias—widowettes ; their Haidées—flappers.

It was thy wont with Paphian girls to dine—
  I also have been somewhat of a rip.
Didst woo and win where ripes Ravenna's wine ?—
  Have I not hung on a *signora's* lip ?
A club-foot was thy bane, a bridge-club mine ;
  Harrovian thine, mine Eton's scholarship.
Didst wander where the leaves in Tempe shook ?—
I too am not unknown to Lunn and Cook.

Thine on a Harrow tombstone, mine at Surley,
  Our kindred youth was spent in solitude,
Far from the ramping schoolboys' hurly-burly.
  As thine, my veering fancy was imbued
With passion's hopes and passion's pangs too early.
  I had a Mary too, and raven-hued
Was every tress of her. Alack ! Love died
The day she yielded them to peroxide !

Thus are we knit by more than earthly ties,
  Geniuses both, if mine the pen more able;
Dowered with an equal spell in ladies' eyes;
  Boasting the same locks of romantic sable;
Alike in pose, alike in garb and guise;
  Twin souls foregathered at the writing-table:
Though mine the subtler wit, the keener irony,
Thou, in thy prime, wast also fairly Byrony.

Wherefore to thee, my prototype less gifted,
  I pay such homage as befits the great;
And should some echo of my fame have drifted
  Down to the shadow-realm of Pluto's state,
Where triple tongues of Cerberus uplifted
  Harass the pipe of bloodless scalds' debate,—
Let these few stanzas, brother mine, assuage
The jealous fury of thy rival rage.

CANTO I

Muses, like married men, must have their fling.
My Muse is in my blood, a bold bacilla;
She is immune to every germ, the sting
Of phagocyte is powerless to kill her.
Vain are the doctored cheeses milkmen bring
Each Sunday morn to my suburban villa;
Vainly the lactic Lancers of Bulgary
Strive to evict her from my little Mary.

She's at her tricks again: the more's the pity;
For I am bound upon another wheel,
And jealous Madame Mammon of the City
Disdains all lovers but the wholly leal.
Curse on the microbe-nymph of lilt and ditty,
That draws me from the courts of Mart and Deal
And the thrice-aureate ways of her who bends,
Warm on my mouth, her raining dividends!

I would give twice the millions of a Cassel,
Treble the billions of a Rhodes bequest,
Could Frankfurt Ehrlich find one numbered vassal
To rid my veins of this poetic pest.
Alack! nor he, nor Metchnikoff, nor Massol,
Nor Wasserman—before whose ghastly test
Shudder bugs, beasties, streptococci, spirachætes—
Have power to quench this inconvenient fire o'Keats.

Science! not all your long research avails
To staunch the flux of literary ranter.
Your bromides cool no Glyn, no Cross, no Wales;
Your antitoxins curb no canto's canter;
And I must bow me to the critics' flails,
To friends' derision and relations' banter.
Henceforth, till some one spots that healing lymph,
Noblesse oblige. Thy servant, fatal nymph!

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

The hero whom I sing is commonplace,
One of the many boys the Bath Club bar knows;
Adroit to drain the glass, to go the pace,
To sup *chez* Oddy with demure sopranos;
A sturdy pillar of our Island Race,
A Paladin of Empire—and Romano's;
Supremely casual, supremely slack;
Answering to the christian name of Jack.

His patronymic dare I not disclose:
For, an I called him Smith, or Jones, or Brown,
And his mild antics caused the wrath of those
Who rule their lives by Mrs. Grundy's frown,
The awful laws of England would impose
Scale-costs and damages for half the town;
To compensate the Joneses, Browns, or Smiths,
Whose friends had traced them through the Muse's myths.

Let it suffice then, that my boy was born
Where purling Otter plashes to the sea
Past sleepy village, and ancestral lawn
Dotted with lilac-bush and cedar-tree;
'Midst hills whose sides loom misty in the dawn,
And coombes where flirting foxgloves trap the bee;
In that blessed land 'twixt Poppleford and Budleigh,
Where the panned cream clots thickly on the chudleigh.

There, 'midst the squires and squiresses of Devon,
His father dwelt; a fine old English Tory
Who feared the King, the Liberals, and Heaven;
And read the Sunday lessons *con amore*.
The lucky first of other brothers seven,
His were the lands, the lineage, the glory
Of wood and wild, beloved of bird and bunny;
Towards whose maintenance he'd married money.

'Twas said that in his youth he had been lavish
Of diamond garter and of orchid-bunch;
Well-skilled the midnight knocker's prize to ravish,
Well-trained the prowling proctor's paunch to punch;
As keen upon the bottle as McTavish,
A very Newnham-Davis over lunch:
Not an Alsatian had been more skittish
Than this much-married Briton of the British,

Courted of neighbours, tenantry and parson;
This M.F.H., this Justice of the Peace
Who deemed the poacher's crime akin to arson,
And trusted in the timing of the police;
Who had briefed Duke and F. E. Smith and Carson,
That trespass on his rights of way might cease;
Nor e'er contrived to make his own life pleasant,
Except by taking theirs from fox or pheasant.

Such was Jack's father. Be it here confessed
Myself, when younger, loved his mother dearly;
Yet now I scarce remember how she dressed,
Or looked, or spoke, or did her hair; though clearly
I recollect how much I was impressed
When I was seventeen years old, or nearly,
And thought myself romantically naughty
Because she was another's wife, and forty.

What of Jack's childhood? Croup and cough and cold,
Mump, measle, laryngitis and diphtheria;
These filled the local doctor's purse with gold,
These caused his lady-mother mild hysteria.
At nine he passed into St. Michael's fold
Where Beetle blends the classic and the cheerier,
Acting, as never acted brother Charles,
Though twinkling eyes belie his fiercest snarls.

Thus his amorphous cubhood did embark
On the tempestuous sea of schoolboy faction;
He learned to wield a hockey-stick, to mark
Each subtle nuance of a googly's action;
While 'Daddy' Peach and both the brothers Clarke
Subdued his soul to Caesar and subtraction;
His illnesses, of whatsoe'er categories,
'Pussy' the matron cured with care and 'Gregory's.'

Dear afternoons of hard-fought football tussles
With rival 'schools for sons of gentlemen'!
Dear nights, when gorgeous girlhood from Miss Russell's
Joined in our dancing-classes, eight to ten;
Till young blood's red and riotous corpuscles
Blushed in each flapper-finger for our ken!
Ah me! too soon our schoolboy bolt was shot,
And Eton, Harrow, Marlborough, bagged the lot.

For Jack 'twas Eton. Praise that kingly founder
Whose statue stands in Upper Chapel Yard!
Reverence those halls where every noble bounder,
Dressed as the rainbow, spotted as the pard,
Slouches uncurbed and rolls his swear-words rounder
Than any private of the Irish Guard!
For there, where bills are ninety pounds a 'half,'
Love found him first, that love by men called 'calf.

Think of him, just a fag as other fags!
He 'played his times'; he passed at Cuckoo Weir;
Idled in 'puppy-hole'; 'Got up to rags';
Envied the 'pops' at 'tap' consuming beer.
He called his foolscap 'bumph,' his trousers 'bags';
Turned to the shouted 'Boy' th' attentive ear—
Finding that 'uppers,' if at times they smack well,
Are not impervious to Crosse and Blackwell.

Fast fled the years. He ceased to 'sock' and 'fug';
No longer 'pi,' though tolerable at 'sap'.
The black and blue that crowns the nameless 'scug,'
Was changed for many an ensanguined cap;
First in his 'Div' save one, and that a 'tug,'
Himself consorted with the bloods at 'tap':
'Twas but a trick of some malicious fate,
That reft him of the glory of the Eight.

Shame that no Henley ever saw my Jack
Flash past the booms, a nose ahead of Radley,
When the slides answer to the sinews' crack
And the *Consuta* dashes after madly!
Shame on you, Dr. Gore, who gave the 'sack'
To that stout 'six' our 'seven' missed so sadly;
And shame, thrice shame, upon that false divinity
Whose kisses gave the Ladies' Plate to Trinity!

Amy! the hearts of men were yours in plenty,
What made you turn to calf-love for a season?
Did it befit a maid of eight-and-twenty
To rob a rising oarsman of his reason?
Was there none other *dolce far niente*
Save this, the blackest depth of female treason?
Had not your brother—he, my hero's tutor—
Warned you and warned, '*alumnus*' wasn't neuter?

You set your spell on Jack, and none suspected.
You cast on him the light eye and the laic,
Till sport and study were alike infected;
Blighted, athletic tasks and algebraic:
Nor were his verses, as of yore, selected
For excellent Iambic or Alcaic.
You were the primal she: with you begins
The tale of his successes, and his sins.

CANTO II

It was the Fourth of June, a festive scene,
  Eton commemorating her foundation.
From Windsor Bridge to Hoppy D's, I ween,
  The High Street hummed with parent and relation.
Hundreds had motored, more the twelve-fifteen
  Disgorged upon the overcrowded station.
Many an *acti temporis laudator*
Arrived to play the querulous spectator.

Here came Financiers, Policemen from the Cape,
  Peers from the Backwoods, Freshers from the Cher,
Bland Politicians, Men of Scarlet Tape,
  Diplomats, Dandies, Bullies of the Bar,
County-court Judges, Lords of Hop and Grape,
  Subalterns, Bishops, Vendors of the Car.
(Strange, how Bench, Army, Embassy, and Till
Bow down to them whose education's *nil* !)

Here with Etonians past and present mingled
Many a dame of beauty, brains and birth;
Nodded their plumes, their golden purses jingled,
Flaunted the frocks of Paquin, Jay and Worth;
Their faultless waists in faultless corsets tingled;
Their lashes curled with mastic and with mirth;—
For all were stars of England's smartest set,
And half their bills was twice our Funded Debt.

My hero's parents patronised the function,
Proud of their child as they that rear on Mellin.
They'd journeyed overnight from Sidmouth Junction,
Father and mother and fair sister Helen;
Haling Aunt Ermyntrude without compunction
From her herbaceous hermitage at Welwyn;
Heedless that bonnet, parasol and bodice ill
Became the day, so she would add a codicil.

They had seen 'Upper Chapel'; yawned through
'Speeches';
Marvelled that tenements of lath and plaster
Should house both him that learns and him that
teaches;
Opined the drainage pregnant with disaster;
Tried the stout ash-plants, bane of slacksters'
breeches;
Lunched; and heard 'Absence' called by the
Headmaster:
And ever waxéd more enthusiastic,
Save Aunt, whose ankles ached 'neath their elastic.

And now they strolled about the tented field
  Where floods arise and Waterloo was won,
Where the vast elms and storied oak-trees yield
  A leafy solace 'gainst the summer's sun :
There the spun leather tricked the willow's shield,
  Or felled the stumps of such as stole the run.
Poor Ermyntrude, what cared you for their cricket,
Who knew not which was umpire, which was wicket ?

He left his 'people,' not without direction
  To seek his rooms so soon the clock struck four ;
And hied him home to don the quaint confection
  Reserved for us who wield the expert oar.
The choicest cates of 'Little Brown's' selection
  His boys-maid brought, and strawberries galore :
So Brown's gave 'tick,' what mattered it that no
    land's
Messes were sweet as ready-money Rowland's ?

When to his taste the tender toast was made,
  Fruits, jams and sandwiches set out together ;
He doffed his 'tails,' his shirt aside he laid,
  With waistcoat, tie, and boots of patent leather ;
In stripe and silk his upper man arrayed,
  In whitest duck and azure socks, his nether ;
Reached for the regal 'straw' that named his
    Boat . . .
And found, 'twixt band and brim,—the nestling
    note!

Perfumed, it was : not such as schoolboys send,
Begging the loan of Boothby book or Gould ;
Mauve was the paper, feminine the trend
Of every line across its surface ruled ;
Secret the words, and few, discreetly penned
By fingers in the art of intrigue schooled.
'Meet me to-night,' was all that he might trace,
'Eleven-thirty, at the usual place.'

Unsigned, undated, meant for him alone
Who guessed the brain that schemed, the hand
that wrought.
Straight at those words, imagination, flown
Beyond the vast refection he had bought,
Pictured the coming joys—not all unknown.
Tea-things and toast and sandwiches were naught :
He dwelt, 'midst retrospect and expectation,
In the rose-glamour of an assignation.

As in a dream, he entertained his guests ;
His thoughts were far from each parental platitude.
Scarcely he hearkened to his aunt's behests ;
Hardly observed his sister's doting attitude :
Yet duly sniggered at ancestral jests ;
Nor quite forgot him of the filial gratitude
That tends obedient cheek to Mater's lip,
Lest Pater should withhold the needed tip.

As in a dream he rowed that afternoon;
Nor recked that 'stroke' was short, and 'seven' late
Such trifles do not mar a Fourth of June,
Though scarce conducive to a Ladies' Plate.
We paddled fast and came to Boveney soon;
Coaxed through the lock each deftly-balanced eight;
And so arrived where waited feast and flunkey,
Hard by the sylvan solitudes of 'Monkey.'

There, at King's Eyot—where on half-holidays,
In midsummer when lock-up goes at nine,
Whiff-gigs and 'riggers pack the waterways—
We moored our craft, and sat us down to dine.
Came aspics, trifles, lobster-mayonnaise;
Foamed the pale cup, the far-from-vintage wine;
Till, from 'Defiance' even unto 'Ark,'
Each feared the moment when he must embark.

Red sunset as we turned our prows down-stream,
To lilt of Boating-Song and plash of blade:
'Neath Athens' walls we saw the ripples gleam;
'Sandbanks' slid by us, ghostlike in the shade:
But when we heard the herald rocket scream,
Many a stalwart rower grew afraid—
For he who looks too fondly on the cup,
Fears in the rocking thwart to raise him up.

The fireworks flashed ; the frail boats drifted past,
  Their upright oarsmen black against the glow ;
And some there were that reeled, and one that cast
  Himself upon the cooling waves below.
The Fourth was over ; Windsorwards at last
  Each proud progenitor was free to go.
Ere midnight boomed from Upper Chapel Tower,
Eton had been in bed a good half-hour.

The new moon rises zenithwards, and wanes.
  The watchman puffs his solitary shag.
No lights illume ' me tutor's ' blinded panes ;
  Sweet slumber falls on boys-maid, blood, and fag.
Here, in the garden where the rambler reigns
  And purple curl the petals of the flag,
Modern Eurydice to modern Orpheus,
One calls her leman from the arms of Morpheus.

'Tis not, by far, the first of their offending ;
  No more for them Life holds its best illusion.
Too well they know the hand-clasp, and the blending
  Of lips that lock in amatory fusion !
Yet little reck that courtship nears its ending ;
  Little they guess their amoret's conclusion,
Or dream another morning's cock-a-doodling
Shall sound a sudden knell to their canoodling.

Dianthus marks their footsteps, and the rose
  Sheds subtle fragrance round them everywhere.
The dew of night is on the grass, the toes
  Of satin shoes are drenched beyond repair;
As Amy, conscious of well-powdered nose,
  And heedful to the dressing of her hair,
Gives lips and hands and eyes and cheeks and tresses,
Soberly, to her suitor's hot caresses.

What foolish vows they pledge, half-sighed, half-
    spoken,
  To the soft soughing of the boughs above.
Her tones to him are melody, and broken
  His own voice as he tells her of his love;
Begging for some, if but a trifling, token—
  The lock he kisses, or the dangled glove;
Deeming each Cytherean rite combined
In Fownes' productions and the curls of Hinde.

Hush! what was that? A footfall on the grass?
  Or but the wind? Or that accurséd collie?
They hold their breath, in hope the Thing may pass:
  Yet ever closer, from behind yon holly,
Grim Tragedy steals stealthily on Farce:
  And now pale Fear usurps the throne of Folly:
For lo! the awful moon reveals the charmer's
Brother in dressing-gown and pink pyjamas!

Adown the path they hear his slippered pad.
His candle flares this side the tennis-net.
Blinking a trifle, for his sight is bad,
He peers and probes amidst the shadows' jet.
'Fly, dearest, fly!' implores the trembling lad:
'It's not too late, he hasn't seen us yet.'
Fly swift thyself, my hero lion-hearted—
Long since, thine artful Amy has departed!

That instant seals Jack's fate; the traitor candle
Unmasks his outline to the searching sage.
Full on the head that Amy loves to dandle,
Bursts the tornado of her brother's rage;
Witless that he who cowers may light a scandal
To sweep him headlong from his tutelage,
He speaks, his voice to wrathy whispers sunk:
'What means this? Are you dreaming, boy, or drunk?'

'Come to my study.' 'Now, sir, if you can,
Elucidate this midnight meditation.
You couldn't sleep? Indeed! A novel plan—
To cure insomnia by ambulation!
What are you hiding there? A lady's fan!
Methinks I scent a different explanation—
A woman! Not a word, sir!! To your bed!!!
This matter shall be laid before the Head.'

Gods ! what a night ! The riven senses reeling
Poised on dark chasms of eternal shame ;
With bloodshot eyeballs glued upon the ceiling,
With tortured head one livid searing flame,
He visioned morning's scrutiny revealing
That fatal fan inscribed with Amy's name.
Sleep came not nigh him, as he tossed and sorrowed
Nor knew the flirting feathers were but borrowed.

But, for each shadow-terror of the night,
The wan day held a tenfold direr pang.
His inmost fibres sickened with affright.
Passed early school ; passed breakfast ; chapel's clang
Summoned to service. Still nor note nor sight
Of her that fled. Suspense's dubious fang
Bit to the bone. On lagging feet and leaded,
Red Gaffney brought the mandate that he dreaded.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Gowned in full state, the deep-mouthed doctor sat
To weigh the sins of scholar fools and flannelled ;
Awesome in aspect, sacerdotal, fat ;
His brows were pent, his forehead deeply channelled.
Hopeless, Jack twirled the unconsoling hat ;
Straight was the dual tribunal empanelled ;
Straight from his tutor's lips, reluctant, fell—
All, save the name the culprit would not tell.

Deaf to their queries, dumb to every wish,
No word escaped the barrier of his teeth.
Vain were their menaces of 'sack' and 'swish,'
Vain was the kindly glance, the threat beneath.
Mute as a man that stalks a wary fish,
Mute as a mourner fingering the wreath,
He would not name, though many the incitements,
The secret paramour of their indictments.

Right here—an I but chose to disregard
The tender lien that bindeth verse to verity—
Should Amy burst, wide eyes with tears bestarred,
Upon that monkish council-room's austerity.
'Mine was the fault—not his! However hard,
Be mine the punishment for his temerity.'
Thus should she clamour, virginal, distraught.
Alas! that she did nothing of the sort.

One word from her had turned the tipping scale;
She spake it not, but left him in the lurch.
And he, too nobly-proud to rend the veil,
Too foolish-fond the damsel to besmirch,
Guarded his silence, left untold the tale
That soon had hurled his tutor from his perch:
While they, whose hearts were high, whose lore was deep,
Prated of 'ravening wolves amidst their sheep.'

They talked of high Tradition, and the goal
  Of youth whose torches mock Temptation's wind;
Of Evil, working secret as the mole;
  Of fell Corruption, hooded, hidden, blind.
'Masters, not men' they were; so pure of soul,
  Naught but the worst conclusion crossed their
    mind.
His unvoiced vices filled them with revulsion.
The sentence was 'Immediate expulsion.'

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Lopped at one sweep of that relentless axe,
  Drops the bright blossom of a lad's career.
As other Jills have ruined other Jacks,
  As Lancelot was damned for Guinevere,
Once more a noble knight shall pay the tax
  Levied on them that hold the sex too dear.
He must away; the carefully-worded wire
Heralds his advent, warns his anxious sire.

It is the end. The locomotive crawls
  Round the curved arch that spans the marshy mead.
He looks his last on Upper Chapel's walls,
  The footer-fields, the fives-courts of his need.
Eton, farewell! your purblind seneschals
  Have done their worst. His future is decreed;
And be it fair, or fouled for evermore—
You bound the millstone on him, Doctor Gore!

CANTO III

PEGGY! my Pegasus that fears no danger—
Not e'en the 'Daily Mail's' Cassandrine sallies—
Take one last feed from thy domestic manger,
Or e'er we plane across those jocund valleys
Where prison waits the enterprising stranger.
We must to Deutschland, *Deutschland über alles*:
Black is the bread her conscript hosts are fed on,
Black shall her eagles loom at Armageddon.

We must set hoof on yon forbidden loam
Where equine steak the Teuton maw assuages;
Leaving nor watch nor ward about our home,
Save Machiavellian Maxwell, and the sages
Who read the runes beneath that Golden Dome
Where Hildebrand cavorts and Harold rages;
That Dome above whose gates is written clear:
'All soap abandon, ye who enter here!'

These shall suffice. Come forth! Be not afraid!
Marconied from Newfoundland to Formosa,
Northcliffe the Silent watches. He who stayed
The dragon in mid-pounce upon the grocer,
And brought the miller back his germ that strayed,
Brooks not that alien army-corps draw closer;
Mailed fists are naught, and naught a Kaiser's arms
worth,
Against the line-o-typists of our Harmsworth.

Our hero dwells in exile for a space:
Answer, good beast, to spur and tightened rein!
Fly at the utmost speed of pinioned pace
To that rich city, Frankfurt-on-the-Maine,
Whither stern parents sent him in disgrace.
For I would carol of my boy again . . .
Youth calls to youth, till fractured hearts grow fickle:
Fair was the Fräulein Elsa Pumpernickel.

She was as meek a flower of maidenhood
As ever blew the froth from *Loewenbraeu*;
Azure her eyes as *Veilchen* from the wood,
Her plaited coils as gold without alloy.
Her father's house in Sachsenhausen stood,
And there, where cider streams for burghers' joy,
She dwelt apart from Rosenveldts and Rosenthals,
Far from the lordly gateways of the Mosenthals.

A *Backfisch*, she, of artifice bereft;
And well content on simple fare to dine.
To cook, to sweep, to sew, her hands were deft;
To bring the slippers, or to pour the wine,
For father late-returning from *Geschaeft*.
The *Jeden-Dienstag-Abend-Tanzverein*,
Her chiefest pleasure; there she hopped and hoped
Some early day would see her *gut-verlobt*.

It fell upon a time when early spring
Lit the rare primrose starwise in the grass,
That the *Staats-Eisenbahn* was issuing
Excursion-tickets to the Saalburg pass—
For so bade Wilhelm, Emperor and King:
And thither fared maid Elsa's dancing-class,
To taste, amidst those haunts of ancient saga,
The mountain air, the sunshine, and the Lager.

Throughout the dreary winter they had studied—
Julius and Hermann, Heinrich, Kurt and Franz—
The schooled deportment of the princely-blooded,
The Austrian waltz, the Rhineland's swifter dance:
And now that fares were cheap and oak-trees budded,
For Hedwig's charms afire, or Greta's glance,
They had subscribed to mark the parting lesson
By a day's outing and an *Abendessen*.

Ach, aber, ach! Across the Taunus hills
Cold blew the winds, till Fritz and Freda shivered:
There were no violets, no daffodils;
Bare to the breeze the leafless branches quivered;
And muslin blouses warded not the chills
From which a winter's serges had delivered.
Couple by couple, soon they wandered down
To friendly shelter at the 'Golden Crown.'

Musik was there, and merriment enow;
Sprang the stout *Kellner*, bearing from afar
Warm solaces for frozen *Mann* and *Frau*:
Uprose the reek of laid-aside cigar,
As Kurt or Heinrich, with a tutored bow,
Besought *Feinslieb* from somnolent mamma;
To dance till hair grew limp and paws were sticky,
And fond heart panted 'neath bepatterned dicky.

It was a scene essentially Teutonic.
The *Rheinwein* flowed, the *Muenchener* foamed on high;
Die Wacht am Rhein resounded philharmonic;
To raftered roof outrang *Die Lorelei.*
Broad-bosomed *Mädchen*, golden-tressed, ironic,
Revelled in ardent swains' idolatry:
They leapt and laughed and bandied blithesome jest—
Maid Elsa gallivanted with the best.

Stay ! who are these, attired as caravanners
That sit aloof to burn an alien flake ?
Weird is their hose, yet weirder are their manners !
This is the breed of Frobisher and Drake,
Braving the flaunt of *Kaiserlichen* banners.
Far from their native land, their native steak,
They dare the *Gasthaus* of a Taunus hamlet,
In British knickers and with British damnlet.

Watch how the fluttered *Fräulein*, beer-imbibing,
Giggle together, murmuring each to each !
Hear how their nervous swains, uncouthly gibing,
Mock at thick boots and Anglo-Saxon speech !
Observe yon mother's busy hands inscribing,
That Paulchen may be clad in English breech !
But, ah, note well the Pumpernickel's blushes
When 'gainst those boots her whirling skirt-hem
brushes !

'Tis He, the silent suitor of the 'Palms,'
For whom long since her simple soul has pined ;
He who has roused to maidenly alarms
Her swelling breast wherein he dwells enshrined ;
Who oft has faced the dullest night of Brahms,
To feast his gaze on her the while she dined.
He dares approach. The hectic pulses shame her.
With halting words and few, he's here to claim her.

Blind is mamma, and gay the waltz of Lincke :
Light on his homespun rests her mittened hand ;
Down the smooth floor they glide ; each *deutscher* drinker
Halts in mid-gulp to watch that saraband.
Let Heinrich rave, let *liebes* Fritzchen think her
Faithless and traitress to the Fatherland :
Little she recks, to whom *his* every feature
Betrays the conquering *Uebermensch* of Nietzsche.

Sways her full form safe-cradled in the crook
Of that embrace, each movement a caress.
Stifled and stiff their speech, but every look
Reflects the thoughts their tones so ill express ;
The Paphian hath small need of Berlitz book,
When eye meets eye in melting tenderness
And Inexperience steeleth to endure
Linked fingers' innocence of manicure.

Thus they twain dance the livelong afternoon.
Now *Schinkenbrod* appears, and scrambled eggs ;
Rollmops is here, and *Hackfleisch*, *Speck* and *Huhn*,
To fortify each weary dancer's legs.
Soon shall the violin be dumb ; and soon,
Empty the vastest of the landlord's kegs.
Hark, 'tis the sacred toast, the final rite !
' *Prosit ! es lebe die Gemüthlichkeit !* '

The hour grows late and chaperones are worrying ;
  Waits the long train aquiver, many-carred.
Stationwards now must man and maid be hurrying ;
  Sprint, or the punctual portals shall be barred !
Here comes the last belated couple scurrying,
  '*Einsteigen*,' '*Abfahrt*,' cries the pompous guard ;
Clangs the loud bell, the wheels revolve ; and hoarse,
Shrieks the pent air that checks the *Kleinbahn's*
    course.

Down where the pinè-tree hugs the crag precarious,
  Down where the lone hut perches on the rock,
Slide the packed carriages. Within, gregarious,
  Here a flowered waistcoat, there a muslin frock,
Huddles the dance-class. Voices rise hilarious ;
  Froths at each halting-place the frequent *Bock*.
But Elsa sits sure-guarded of her mother,
Clasping one palm in hers. . . . Whose clasps the
    other ?

Woe for a hero-heart, capricious, plastic,—
  It is the hand that erst to Amy's clung !
Woe for a hero-mouth, whence no scholastic
  One single phrase in her betrayal wrung,
Waxing to stranger orbs enthusiastic,
  Murmuring treason in a hostile tongue !
Woe for the wine of love, surpassing Claymore,—
Though Amy's lost to Jack . . . remaineth Amor !

To him Mars tends no bays, and none Minerva ;
  Taboo to him, the sword-hilt and the sermon ;
Who gave his all for Venus, and must serve her
  Whether her altars English be, or German.
Jealously burn to mark that wooing-fervour,
  Heinrich and Julius, Kurt and Franz and Hermann;
But the blonde priestess heeds them not, the while
Her mother's snores boom louder, mile on mile.

Too soon the lights of Frankfurt town appear,
  Specks of blurred fire athwart the cloudy pane ;
'Tis time and time to garner scattered gear.
  Slower, and ever slower, jolts the train.
Worship is over ; parting-time is here ;
  Mothers must waken, hands unclasp again.
One British 'Darling,' one Germanic '*Schatz*' . . .
And Jack's alone upon the *Bahnhof Platz*.

Alone ! and yet no more in isolation,
  No more by dreams of forfeit Blue perplexed :
Forgot, the stigma of his rustication,
  The wrongs men wrought, injustices that vexed;
E'en Amy's treachery. The first temptation
  Fadeth before the glamour of the next.
Lo ! with light step and firm, our outlaw passes
To quaff the amber of unending glasses.

CANTO IV

From that amazing night when Elsa durst
  Fondle the scion of a race detested,
We English lost our Jack. The tongue he'd cursed.
  With *Der und Die und Das und Dem* infested,
Was more to him than ours. He slaked his thirst
  Where nary a compatriot molested:
And all our colony bemoaned the jingo
Whom alien looks had lured to alien lingo.

Never he danced at 'Anglo-Saxon' balls,
  Where *Frangipanni* vies with *Floradora*,
And the three-years-discarded fashion galls
  The powdered backs of England's exiled flora;
No more within the Café Bristol's halls
  His countless cannons petrified the scorer;
No more he drained our *Bowle* and our *Steinwein*,
To whom *Schloss Venusburg* was more than *Rhein-wein*.

He left our lasses clad in *point de Whiteley*,
Their feathered neck-wraps and their rusty laces;
To wander in the Palmengarten nightly,
Courting his Teuton's portlier embraces.
He learned to click his heels, to bow politely;
He cultivated foreign airs and graces;
Until in him Frau Pumpernickel saw
Each aspect of an ideal son-in-law.

And Elsa, every fibre subtly stirred,
To his attentions, flower-like expanded;
Pictured herself betrothed; in slumber heard
The wedding-march of choir-boys sammet-banded.
Each dainty her *Herr Englaender* preferred,
Against his frequent visits she commanded;
Doubting not, *Leberwurst* and *Sauerkraut*
Would help her mightily to be a *Braut*.

At Bütschly's Tea-rooms we would see them sip
The *Chokolade* or the *Eiskaffee*,
While watchful *Mutti's* Gorgon guardianship
Was bane to all but glances' interplay.
Tante! 'twas you who let the sweethearts slip
Beyond your custody; and gave alway,
To them that chided you, the old excuse:
'*Die erste Liebe sei doch ja so süss.*'

So waxed their intimacy, till betimes
  Methought on Elsa's hand might shine a stone
To change the playful trend of these my rhymes;
  Almost he'd claimed a *Haus-Frau* for his own,
And lived and died beneath those genial climes
  Where man still lords it on the marriage-throne.
Saved! in the nick of time! Muse, blare a clarion
For Mrs. Vermont, Susie, Mame, and Marion!

For Old Man Vermont, yclept Hiram S.,
  President of the Vermont Butter Trust,
Whom Syracuse and Kansas City bless
  Whene'er they smear his product on their crust!
Men know his pound of butter weigheth less
  Than foolish tables think that butter must;
Yet bow the knee and pardon his duplicity,
Who knows the weight of magazine-publicity.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Now we that sing must make our Yankees rich—
  Millions on millions pile—on motor, motor.
They must own Banks, Bonds, Biscuits, Bacon-flitch,
  From Patagonia's pampas to Dakota;
And every girl who emanates from Mich.,
  Fla., Col., Wis., Ark., Pa., Va., Cal., Minnesota,
Waggon Wheel Gap or Little Rock or Dallas,
Must be as Dian fair, more chaste than Pallas.

These be the milk-white maidens of romance,
Their cheeks unkissed—unpowdered as their noses,
For whom brave knights mount horse and shiver lance,
To whom square-shouldered boys bring 'Beauty' roses;
These rule alike the palace and the manse,
As Robert Chambers charmingly discloses:
Though why these things are, neither he nor I know . . .
Unless the cause of them be father's rhino.

Muse! let us not depart from rule nor rote,
But rather make these heroines the types
On which Columbia's female readers dote:
Thus shall we sell beneath those Stars and Stripes,
Whither our puppet soon must catch the boat.
Lend me, dear nymph, thy very purest pipes!
For an we give one virgin Vermont stamina,
Munsey and Scribner will unite in damnin' her.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

'Twas on a gorgeous day in late July,
The Vermonts tarried by Wiesbaden's waters.
There sat the magnate, with the 'eagle' eye,—
Vide friend Hearst's and Pulitzer's reporters—
Flanked by his splendid spouse, serene and spry;
Crowned with his triple aureole of daughters.
Mommer dreamed peerages; and Popper, pelf;
Each of the damsels dreamed about herself.

The sun-motes danced on either freckled cheek
Of brown-tressed Susie, slender, seventeen;
Gilded the corn of Mamie's locks, the sleek
Imperious jet of Marion's: such a sheen
Had Helen's hair when all the world was Greek.
An heiress each—and doubly thus a queen—
They stood, those keen-eyed huntresses, at gaze,
When chanced my Jack adown the gravelled ways.

Perfect his pose was, faultless his attire,
God-like the poise of each athletic limb;
He walked as one aloof from Schmidt and Meyer,
Booted of buckskin, flannel-trousered, slim.
And Cupid lit a torch of swift desire
In those three watchers at the sight of him:
So that Mame paled, and Marion grew dumb,
And Susie's lips forgot their chewing-gum.

When woman craves and plutocrats abet,
Rivers run dry; the planets change their courses;
Mountains rush leaping up to Mahomet,
Heedless of gravitation's lesser forces.
Before another evening's sun has set,
(Who knows the depth of feminine resources?)
Fettered and shackled to the Vermont group,
Jack tastes the Kursaal's most expensive soup.

Poor jilted Elsa, lonely in thy bower,
Cease to indite pathetic *Ansichtskarten,*
Sad with forget-me-not's cœrulean flower.
In trysting grottoes of the Palmengarten
Await him not at the appointed hour.
Er kommt nicht mehr, was hilft das lange Warten?
He comes no more, that lover rich and regal:
What are your swan-songs to the screaming eagle?

Feinsliebchen writhes in Transatlantic talons,
He's fed on bortsch and caviar and trout;
For him 'White Seal' outpours Lethean gallons,
Bringing oblivion of *Backfisch Braut.*
Mame's arms weave spells more potent than Maud Allan's;
Deadly as Lorelei, is Marion's pout;
Maddens as *Nixe,* Susie, lithe and lissom,
Whose lips call lads to love but never kiss 'em.

They'll book his passage at appalling rates,
They'll cable for his governor's consent;
Thus shall they bear him captive to the States,
Their bows' reward, their spears' emolument.
Vain was the hope of Pumpernickel pates,
Vain was the sweet connivance Auntie lent;
In Yankee gyves your bridegroom shall be hauled off
To Broadway, Forty-second, and the Waldorf.

CANTO V

We'd planned a prologue, Muse and I together,
Full of the west winds, circling corybantic ;
We'd hoped for calm days when the curlew's feather
Glinted in sunshine of the wide Atlantic.
Music, alas ! was murdered of foul weather ;
Angry Poseidon drove us almost frantic.
Poor Muse and I, we made a pretty pair ;
Master and mistress, mad with *mal-de-mer*.

Strange, we should girdle earth, without duenna—
Setting our Peckham's priestesses agog—
From Popocatapetl to Vienna,
From Hampstead's radiant hills to Putney's fog,
From ports where houris manicure with henna,
To pubs where Chinks ensoup the hairless dog ;
Yet never breakfast ta'en on floating palaces,
But swiftly goes to join the churning helices.

Ah, cruel god, why set us twain afloat
To be the sport of all the blasts that blow—
Only to let the pallid poet note
His pendant garments swinging to-and-fro,
While rolls and pitches our infernal boat
Past wonder-isles and coral-capes aglow
With Star-magnolia, Sinjib-tree and Lotus,
Whose wafted fragrance mingles with our Zotos?

By Neptune racked, foredamned of Mrs. Grundy,
The leaden skies are shut to our appeals;
The tide that hurtles through the Bay of Fundy
Sweeps seaward our rejected evening-meals;
From Table Mount to Ladram Bay and Lundy
We feed the fish beneath ten thousand keels;
Discarding White Star lunches, Cunard teas,
From Ballycotton to the Cyclades.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

For us the *Deutschland* made no record run,
Fiercely she dandled her Pindaric freight.
Her band droned *Parsifal* from ten till one,
Then *Götterdämmerung* from two till eight.
Ah, with what joy we glimpsed the watery sun,
Where Liberty and Loeb, enthroned, await—
That none who dwell beneath the spangled banner
Shall rob the Customs of a single tanner!

Many a he- and many a she-detective
Ambushed our liner's advent at the docks;
To dollars deaf, impervious to invective,
They plunged profaning hands in shirts and sox.
'Death to the wights whose papers are defective!
'Death to the smugglers of the silver fox!
'Death to the criminals of Street or Curb!
'I am the law you made,' quoth Mr. Loeb.

He cross-examined every one with vigour,
Assuring us 'twere better to be frank;
No Saratoga 'scaped his lynx-like rigour:
Irish or Dago, furriner and Yank,
He searched us all: he prodded hair and figure:
Matron and millionaire before him shrank:
And some he warned, and some he fined, and some
He sent to Sing-Sing for a month to come.

Apart, unmoved, behind his Panatela,
Old Hiram stood, of journalists surrounded:
No impious fingers groped in his Viyella,
None probed his wife, his daughters' trunks none sounded;
As lief might one have searched a Rockefeller,
As lief a Morgan's dressing-case impounded,
As dared to reek an Inquisition's lust
Upon the ruler of the Butter Trust.

There too were Susie, Marion, and Mame,
With Mrs. Vermont, voluble in mauve;
And thither their abducted Briton came,
Hands in his pockets, curious eyes arove.
They left their grips for menials to claim;
In reckless haste their Gallic chauffeur drove,
Till midday saw them safe beneath the ægis
Of that palatial hostel, the Saint Regis.

Years since they'd parted with the Vermont home,—
Within whose lordly gates on Sixty-second,
Tiffany Glass had winked at ancient Rome
And Nouveau Art to Cinquecento beckoned;—
To dwell at ease where vasty bills up-clomb.
Though they had lost ancestral halls, they reckoned
That 'vurry little trouble with the maids'
Was more than auctioned bronzes and brocades.

Their rent was but ten thousand dollars yearly,
The which included telephone and ice;
Had they a want—they pressed a button merely,
And floor-clerks satisfied it in a trice.
What if their entertaining cost them dearly?—
The *maître-d'hotel* alone was worth the price,
Lord of the waiter-throng that whirled on booby toes
Before the fury of his '*Vieni subito's*.

Conscious his women had no household cares,
  Would Hiram sally early from his flat
To do great battle with the Bulls and Bears
  For margarines and cotton oils and fat:
The while they ruffled it on Sherry's stairs,
  Or bought at Lichtenstein's the stunning hat;
Nor minded Envy's tongue nor Hatred's mutter,
So long as men demanded bread—and butter.

Whate'er the smartest did, that also they did;
  Their steam yacht queened it on the Hudson's
    stream,
Their Fiats down Fifth Avenue paraded,
  Their diamonds set the Opera House agleam.
Such was their wealth that they had escaladed
  Those heights where Potted Armour reigns
    supreme,
To mingle unabashed with Corey, Kessler,
Jack Johnson, Astorbilt, and Marie Dressler.

And everyone in that exclusive set
  Gave the glad hand of welcome to our Jack;
They found his lineage was in Debrett,
  And made him free of club and poker-pack:
Till dinner-dances gat him to forget
  The last least recollection of the 'sack,'
Till Frankfurt days and golden Elsa's smile
Were one with Eton Amy's traitress guile.

They told him: though Chicago might be 'slicker,'
'Noo York' undoubtedly was 'Little It.'
They bade the bar-keep hustle with the liquor;
They 'set them up' until 'the pikers quit.'
Where Broadway's aching sky-signs flame and flicker,
None handed him the 'frozen face' nor 'mitt,'
Not even the Andromaches and Hectors
He met at Little Hungary and Rector's.

But ah! the gorgeousness of Gotham's daughter,
Belle upon belle in raptured ranks untold;
From Fifth and Eighth, and Brooklyn o'er the water,
Each peach alike in measure, mind, and mould;
Attired alike, alike equipped for slaughter,
Perfect of posture, introspective, cold!
Would Heaven, one such damsel sighed for me!
And he, my Jack, was coveted of three!

For him, frail Susie's flapperdom was wreathed
In smiles that might incite a monk to woo;
For him, the heart of Mame, impassioned, seethed
Despite its ventilating Peek-a-boo;
To him, the haughty Marion ne'er bequeathed
That suitor-scaring legacy, 'Skidoo.'
Though Mayflower maidens stoop not to caresses
They loved the flattery of his addresses.

Even their father's soul of triple steel
  Melted a trifle to our hero's charm.
Aye, he that crushed the brokers with his heel
  And cornered B.R.T. without a qualm,
Would oft invite him to the midday meal;
  And, heedless of the ticking tape's alarm,
Would linger talking to him over lunch,
The cynosure of all the 'Swifter Bunch.'

For though New York's a maelstrom of the morals,
  And though her hours fly past at fever heat
As husbands wrestle for expensive laurels
  To strew before their pampered spouses' feet;
At Martin's there are blondes, brunettes, and sorrels,
  To tempt the virtue of the most discreet:
And there, 'midst luxury and lovely ladies,
Would Hiram tell how stocks had gone to Hades.

Not mine to recapitulate the panic
  Which shook the world that memorable November:
How Lawson leapt on Standard Oil, titanic;
  And Roosevelt fanned the spark of scandal's ember;
How bold men bolted on the *Oceanic*;
  How, one by one, each frenzied Wall Street member,
As Steels or Unions wilted down to nixes,
Forsook the Banks of Finance for the Styx's.

Not ours, Muse mine, to pen for all futurity
The story of Columbia's disgrace;
Nor how the baleful bird of Business Purity
Flapped its fell pinions in a nation's face,
Plunging in gloom debenture and security;
How bright Corruption fled, and in her place
The Square Deal festered, noisomest of cankers,
On Senators and Businessmen and Bankers:

So that men worshipped not the Great God Graft,
The old old god their fathers' fathers knew;
So that none cooked accounts, none forged the draft,
None robbed the toiler of his moiling's due,
Nor loosed the gilded murderer as daft,
Nor lynched one black for ten their grandsires slew;
So that men found not in the pork of Libby a
Minutest trace of Lithuanian fibia.

Not such our themes. Beyond our flimsy string,
Those Potentates of Copper and of Oil
Who wrought and fought till that fell bird took wing
For evermore from Transatlantic soil.
We may not sing the Boom-plant's burgeoning,
The rising markets and the stocks aboil;
Nor bow the knee in fealty before
Tobacco's monarch and his cuspidor.

Rather must we, along the Gay White Way,
Far from the clang of greater things be tending,
Far from the dollared battle-line's array:
For whether shares were soaring or descending,
Beyond the power of hapless husbands' sway,
The women went on confidently spending;
And he who sought to curb his lady's beano,
Was like to find her hurrying to Reno.

CANTO VI

Opera night! Tiaraed, titivated,
  Huge jewels glittering on bepowdered skin,
The Metropolitan's elect awaited
  The loves and *leitmotif* of Lohengrin.
Box upon box, the Horseshoe scintillated;
  Blended the trial twang of violin
With scrape of 'cello and the expectant hum
Of all the denizens of Dollardom.

Right in the midmost of that sacred tier
  Where none but Knickerbocker stock may tread,
Did Susie, Mame, and Marion appear;
  And Mrs. Vermont, much bediamonded.
There gloomed the visage of the financier;
  And there, with brilliantine upon his head,
Our ex-Etonian twirled his evening gloves,
Proud of cream waistcoat, proud of triple loves.

Wandered his gaze from Marion's lustrous nape
To Mame's smooth arms upon the velvet ledge,
To winsome curves of flapper Susie's shape.
Ever his right hand sought the collar's edge,
White-walled, tremendous, whence the fashioned tape
Of tie's perfection shot its waisted wedge.
Tapped the conductor; tinkled prompter's bell;
And darkness shrouded our voluptuous swell.

Masterful through the darkling house, and mystic,
Thrilled the first whisper of those scarlet chords,
Golden with wedding-bells' pervading distich,
Seared with the sable flame of Treason's swords.
Alas! was ever Dives altruistic?
Murmur of voices and the clink of gauds
Ruined that overture; and scarcely slacked
When rose the curtain on the opening act.

For who would heed an Elsa von Brabant,
When Mrs. Lydig had her emeralds on?
Who would not turn from Teuton basso's rant
To where the panoplies of Paquin shone?
Shall not the Leiter rubies more enchant
Than some casqued knight that serenades a swan?
Though clapped each song, the *entr'acte* was the cause
Of even more-tumultuous applause.

Then might a man, released from music's thralls,
Mark, and remember well, that blazing mass
Which filled the boxes and o'erflowed the stalls.
Then might the dudes on instant errand pass,
To pay the hurried round of friendly calls
Or quaff the dry Martini's fearsome glass.
'Twas then almighty Jove sent Prudence Swift
To cut a hero's heart once more adrift!

Prudence—the new-wed wife of that dread man
Swift, of the 'Swift and Swanker Dry-goods Store,'
(Whose catalogs the anxious drapers scan,
From Pensacola to Seattle's shore
Cursing the scheme of his mail-order plan
Which brings New York to San Francisco's door);
Swift, by whose founts the typist-girls decree
Their Corydons must wait till they are free.

Gods! how she looked that night! Each purple tress
Did but enhance the white bright brow of her;
The sheen and shimmer of unearthliness
Haloed about her; all Virginia's burr
Fell from her upcurled lips, as the caress
Of Southland's breeze 'midst balsam pines astir:
She was a slender and a tiny thing
To set youth's passion-flower a-blossoming.

But all Jack's blood to new-born knowledge leapt,
Before the kindling of her countenance.
Through vein and vein a tingling tremor crept,
To catch the glow from those wide orbs askance
Wherein the fires of feeling never slept.
Of little worth seemed Mame's or Susie's glance,
Or Marion's virgin ice, if one might rest
His love-tired head upon that blue-veined breast.

So sweet the word, so small the hand she gave,
So nebulous the haze of her alluring,
That strange mad dreams from ivory gates outdrave;
And, strong beyond the power of his enduring,
Surged the full-risen tide of passion's wave,
Bursting its bonds and boyhood's long immuring.
It was as though a choir of seraphim
Had pealed a trumpet-blast, and deafened him!

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

There are red-letter evenings in our lives,
When the pent soul outleaps its prison-den;
And shame it is, that mistresses and wives
Should be so deadly keen of acumen
That never lover, no, nor spouse contrives
To cloak such instants from their piercing ken!
As from afar the vulture spies the carrion,
So looked for trouble Susie, Mame, and Marion.

Smiling, the temptress passed; but as the Yid
Knows well the slump-signs ere the slump convulses,
Beneath that masking of aloofness hid,
They sensed the quivers of his secret pulses.
Through mannered shield their bladed instinct slid,
To where the inmost core of man demulces:
And when the curtain finally descended,
To certain fear each raised suspicion tended.

Nervous were they that supper had been mooted;
Nervous were they to note how Prudence bowed,
What time the myriad motor-sirens tooted
And footmen's voices thundered long and loud.
Deep in their brains conviction sank and rooted,
Whenas she joined them in the hatted crowd
That throngs, as thick as sea-birds on the Skerries,
Beneath the blazing chandeliers at Sherry's.

For who was Prudence Swift, that Jack should seek her
While all men saw *them* stand neglected by?
Was any tress of hers than Marion's sleeker,
Was she as Mame demure, as Susie spry,
That he should pledge her in Veuve Clicquot's beaker?
But when they saw the look, half-glad, half-shy,
That greeted him whom each desired as mate—
Fear and Suspicion turned to Wrath and Hate.

They *knew!* No need to watch his glances wander
To that near table where the hussy preened!
Conscious of nerves on fire, of heart grown fonder,
Their jealous souls to equal envy greened.
No more, they vowed, should Vermont wealth's Golconda
Be poured for her whose treachery they weened
Than witch's, ghoul's, or body-snatcher's, ranker;
No more, vowed each, she'd deal with 'Swift and Swanker.'

They left the lordly terrapin untasted,
They left the lone Lynnhavens on the shell;
The canvas-back with oranges they wasted,
The planked shad held them not. Ere worse befell,
With one accord they girded up and hasted
Back to the fortalice of their hotel:
To hide their shame, their fury and their sorrow;
And plot retaliation for the morrow.

There is a limit set for all our Odysseys,
There are some portals never man may dare.
I witnessed not that council of the goddesses,
Those half-bared limbs, that loosed and rippling hair,
Those bright breasts freed from camisoles and bodices:
Nor heard the awful words they uttered there,
As, 'midst their combs, their unguents and their creams,
They hatched the plot that ended boyhood's dreams.

'Tis hard to leave a love-lorn hero sleeping,
Harder to leave a heroine unkissed;
To see Romance 'twixt rosy petals peeping,
Only to know the boy-god's shaft has missed.
Yet Cupid shall be sweeter for the keeping,
Nor Vermont's victories for aye persist:
Though their arts strengthen now and hers diminish,
He still shall come to Prudence ere the finish.

CANTO VII

THERE is a languorous land of stars and spices;
  Southward it lies, where warm the Gulf-stream's wave is
And winter-girls sit sipping summer-ices;
  There trills the cat-bird alway, and the mavis,
On gateways scrolled with crumbled Spain's devices;—
  A land well-loved of Richard Harding Davis.
Thither they haled my Jack, that goddess-crew,
To purge his fancy of the guileful Prue.

Scarce had they brooked a second Sol's uprising,
  Scarce had they recked of suitable attire.
'Twas not the hour for attitudinising;
  With twice the hustle of their hustling sire
They scanned the Seaboard Air Line's advertising:
  And straightway, to its most befoldered flier,
The word went forth to hitch their private car;
Saint Augustine, its destination, Fla.

All through the night the panelled Pullman sped,
A banded flame along the ice-bound sleepers;
Past Baltimore, and Washington abed,
It whirled the wakeful captive and his keepers;
Till morn revealed a nearer Phœbus, red
On leafless branches of Virginia's creepers;
And Mrs. Vermont, adipose, imperial,
Summoned her progeny to shredded cereal.

Never I saw the early Postum drunk
By neater maids, in my most travelled days.
Dew-fresh they came. Not theirs the public bunk;
Not theirs the ordeal of the drummer's gaze,
The warden darkie chanting 'Check yer trunk'
Adown the stuffiness of curtained ways;
They had not let the Lisle-thread leaping go
To wake the stranger snoring far below.

But slumbered, undisturbed, on sheets of lawn,
In nighties wrought with gossamer insertion;
Till clink of teacup heralded the dawn,
And Gallic slaves perfumed for their immersion
The silver bath. For them, paid hands had drawn
The corset-tapes of paupers' own exertion;
Linked up the mazy fastenings 'twixt their shoulders
And sent them forth to gladden all beholders.

Divine, they were! yet neither Susie's chatter,
Nor Mame's neck peeping from the collar's lace,
Nor Marion's marble brow, had power to scatter
The doleful clouds that hid one mortal's face.
Wordless sat Jack throughout the breakfast-clatter;
Watching, in dumb distress, the landscape race
Athwart the windows—swampland, wild, and wood,
That sundered him from riper womanhood.

Sadly he sought the smoking-car's seclusion.
But they, not unaware how soon Time heals
Such baby-hearts of immature contusion,
Made glad with music of the flying wheels,
Rejoiced to guess their enemy's confusion;
Smiled through the railroad's tinned and tasteless meals;
Laughed, when at length they sallied from their dimitied
Staterooms and waved *adios* to the Limited.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

The moon hung rounded in the velvet sky,
Ensilvering Fort Marion's crouching towers;
Flashed in the canebrake many a gaudy fly;
Wafted the night-wind scents of southern flowers:
But no joy glimmered in the captive's eye.
His thoughts were far, so far from maiden bowers
He could not frame the customary pæan
Anent the palm-courts of the 'Ponce de Leon.'

In vain the trio strove, with honeyed speeches,
With bubbly gold of gigglewater's chill,
To light his gloom ; futilely from the beaches
Bade bring the bluest blue-fish to the grill.
Their prisoner was not pacified with peaches;
Not though they added to the tempting bill
Most luscious squablets *sautés à la Maryland*,
Would he admit their Florida was fairyland.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

But who shall stand against Olympian scheming ?
When latitudes on longitudes dissever
The dreamer from the dream-face of his dreaming,
What continence is Cupid-proof forever ?
Shall past loves hold, when present space is teeming
With shapes as kind, as beauteous, as clever ?
Not while our Tristrams, Lancelots, Endymions,
Descend inconstant from inconstant Simians !

Poor Prudence, out-manœuvred, ambuscaded !
A few short weeks beneath those halcyon palms—
And the sharp recollection of you faded !
The Everglades, the Alligator-farms,
Low converse on verandahs balustraded,
Gave victory once more to Vermont arms ;
The Ocklawaha's waves and Silver Spring
Were weighty allies for that triumphing.

He was so idle, Susie so delightful;
You were so distant, she so very near!
Jack was a child, Prue! Was it less than rightful
That he should yearn, and yet withhold in fear,
To kiss that flapper-mouth so sweetly-spiteful?
Do not be angry if he held her dear;
Forbear to chide him, if he felt the same
Desire for Marion and adjacent Mame!

And if the pure soul of a Gotham maiden
Knew no revulsion when she 'gan discover
How touch of slender finger-tips and braiden
Pigtail have spells to spur a laggard lover—
Blame not my Susie! blame the perfume-laden
Breeze of the South-sea! blame the sun above her!
For Mame and Marion, if more discreet,
Melted no little in that kindly heat.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Now whether Susie kissed, or merely trifled;
If Marion was maidenly, or fast;
Whether blonde Mamie satisfied, or stifled
Her fevered hopes; if their adored one passed
Out of their lives, unconquering; or rifled
The untouched treasures of six lips at last;
Belong not here. Those transports, faint or fiery,
Are they not written in each Vermont diary?

But *I* am done with love, and love's dull dallying—
I, who erst deemed the Paphian almighty!
Soul-sickened of the nagging nymphlets rallying
Around the dreary groves of Aphrodite,
Of Amaryllis's embraces tallying
With cuddles culled from Cynthia and Clytie;
I will observe, and stony-hearted mock,
When Lesbians dive from their Leucadian rock.

Me, neither Fragoletta nor Dolores
Shall cheat again, nor any Queen of Troy.
No more I hanker for Faustinian glories;
Pasiphäe may choose another boy.
Semiramis, and Ephrath's sister houris,
Shall sup withouten me at the Savoy.
In one last Parthian couplet, here I damn
Felise, Alaciel, and Ahinoam.

Venus, adieu! (at least, for several verses).
Come, Gods of Wassail and of loathly Lucre!
Passion, farewell! I sing of bulging purses,
Thy bowers abandon for left bowers of euchre.
Hark to a tale of Fortune's mad reverses,
Hark to false feet that patter the *cachuca!*
Lead on, my grim chameleon, The Joker,
Unto the inmost Jackpot of thy Poker!

CANTO VIII

'Twas Hiram's sloop *The Merry Margarine*
Stood out one evening for the summer seas;
Out from the harbour of Saint Augustine,
A bachelor barque, she bowed her to the breeze.
High on her poop the magnate stood, serene;
And, as she glided past the coral quays,
Opined himself most lucky-born of Adam,
To be released from daughters and 'the Madam.'

Throughout those shining decks, from wheel to spanker,
No female accent twanged its spoil-sport harp:
Freed for the nonce were Hogg, the ice-king banker,
And Cyrus Hunk, the corporation sharp;
Prueless, the overlord of 'Swift and Swanker';
Spouse-rid and gay, Elihu Polycarp—
That slick State-Senator who snoozed abaft,
Perpending many novelties in graft.

Joyful as men that lift the lonely latch,
To each the lengthening leagues meant liberty:
Yet one was there, who sprawled upon the hatch,
A wifeless member of that company,
Beneath whose Panama's resplendent thatch
Regret walked hand-in-hand with ecstasy;
Who had been happier, an the lugger bore
One Ariadne from the hither shore.

The tropic moon their orgies saw. Not one rose
To breakfast, from his matutinal sleep.
Six days they cut the warded waves where Monroe's
Tenets proclaim the eagle's sovereign sweep.
Low in the dawn-mist, as the seventh sun rose,
Lay Cuba's shield upon the azure deep.
Where the sunk *Maine* defied Time's probing gauge,
They furled their canvases at anchorage.

Their landing-party stormed the Miramar;
Drawn cutlery in hand, they sacked its store
Of regal viands; echoed from afar
The highball's thunder and the Piper's roar.
Cosmopolita and the Paris bar
Yielded them treasures of 'White Seal' galore:
The captured agent of the Western Line
Paid them rich ransom of imported wine.

Satiate and slaked, the buccaneers meandered,
Arm linked in arm, adown the lonely Prado.
Never a flagstaff flaunted Cuban standard;
None barred their path. From Carcel to Vedado
Nary a black-shawled *chica* there philandered,
For mid-siesta claimed each desperado.
Only, they heard the rare *cochero's* bells
And caught the tang of unimagined smells.

Struck five o'clock. Awoke the drowsy town.
They hailed them hacks, and joined the wheeled parade
That throngs the sea-front ere the sun goes down.
Dressed in her best—Parisian, unpaid—
Braving *querido's* Caribbean frown,
Smiled on the strangers many a Cuban maid.
Pale things they were, most passionate and dapper
Once sloughed the husk of their domestic wrapper.

By six the sudden sun set, scarlet, splendid;
A fresh gale blew from off the murky bay.
To the 'Pasaje' then their way was wended;
For dinner called, and brooked of no delay
Save one—and that the bar-keep iced and blended;
One golden cocktail, climax of the day,
Bitter as gall, afire with Gordon gin . . .
Down it like men! and let the meal begin!

Jamon gallego, thus the menu ran,
Ostras cubanas, Pote de lentillas:
Followed strange fish, most hard to rhyme and scan,
Pargos y Guaguaguanchos y Cabrillas:
Arroz con pollo, Queso parmesan,
Helados, Fresas, Peras, Manzanillas:
Nor smoked their ebon *Cazadores*, till
Five empty magnums swelled the lengthy bill.

Then Hiram quoth: 'That dinner was a dandy.
Let's make a night of it. To hell with bed!'
'Twas Swift and Hunk abandoned not the brandy,
'Twas Hogg that vowed he'd paint the village red;
But Polycarp who kept the ice-pail handy.
Heavens, how reeled my Jack's unseasoned head!
How vague and veiled remain his adumbrations
Of their post-prandial perambulations!

How dimly he remembers, down the years,
The gardens where mysterious maidens trod;
The streets where sailors jostled muleteers;
The marble floors; the dancers satin-shod;
Even that houri, roses at her ears,—
That *jovencita* of the ardent nod,
From whom he learnt how hot lips of Habana
Outmatch the frozen images of Dana.

Maria ? Carmencita ? powdered pet,
With curling lashes eloquent of Seville,
You are forgot ! Yet ne'er shall Jack forget
The bankrupt ending of that frolic revel ;
Clear-cut for aye, 'gainst memory's sky shall fret
The bluffs that towered up from the green board's level,
And Hogg's grim face, and that wan dawn of sorrow
Breaking behind the ramparts of the Morro.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

They'd fled the glare of San Nasidro's quarter,
The shadow-haunted doorways, and the sheen
Of ruby lamps that pointed Pleasure's daughter.
They'd rattled down, by shuttered streets and mean,
To where, across the oily harbour-water
Gleamed the lit awnings of the *Margarine.*
There, having drunk and each made due confession
They cleared the planking for a poker-session.

The chips were stacked ; the ante-moneys staked ;
The Jackpots bloated in their opened pride.
Straddles were filled, and rattling counters raked ;
Sounded the challenge, ' See you, or divide.'
The starshine faded as Aurora waked,
The ripples plopped and muttered overside ;
And Polycarp, without the faintest blush,
Raised Hiram forty on a bobtail flush.

'Forty *and forty*,' then the Butter Lord :
Said Hogg and Hunk as one, 'The woods for me,'
Down went the cards of Swift upon the board,
'Twas time and time for two small pairs to flee :
Not so our hero ; Lily, Kate and Maud
Queened in his hand ; 'And forty more,' cried he.
'Pass,' quoth the Senator. Ah, monstrous Fate
That let the magnate draw his middle straight !

Dawn on Cabañas fort broke cool and sweet.
Still they played on ; the rises waxed apace.
They claimed Whang-Doodles after every meet,
They took four cards what time they held an ace.
Cold, aye and colder, froze the winners' feet ;
Long, aye and longer, stretched each loser's face ;
As now the banker, now the legal sharp,
Were bluffed and bluffed again by Polycarp.

On Jack alone no kindly fortune smiled :
He filled no fulls, improved no single pair :
The deuce of spades his diamond flush defiled ;
His cherished kickers kicked not anywhere.
On either side he saw his lost 'bones' piled,
In front of him the chanceless baize was bare ;
Alternate straights and kilters were his lot
Up to the final consolation-pot.

A traitor ace-flush egged him to his end,
  Five sable clubs, Elihu doled him—pat.
It was a fitting time that luck should mend;
  For Hunk had raised and Swift had doubled that...
Ah, lost two thousand, never his to spend!
  One card, the cautious opener drew; and sat,
Seeing each raise, while hero, Hunk and Swift
Proceeded one another's bets to lift.

Ah, ye tall tens, infrangible quartet
  That Hogg displayed, unalterably four!
In the show-down three lordly hands ye met,
  Met but to roll them on the discard's store!
The slender straight that Cyrus overbet,
  The triple knaves that served their Swift so sore,
And those dark clubs in which a Briton trusted,
Futile they were—far better had ye busted.

Rose the new sun upon a scene of woe,
  Glinted on polished cards and amber chips,
Setting the glass of overnight aglow.
  Loud rang the curses from four Yankee lips.
But did the stripling grouse? Judge ye who know
  Our English bulldog in his dying grips.
Calm-eyed, disdaining subterfuge or boast,
Jack borrowed fourteen hundred from his host.

The curtain falls : what boots it to reveal
  The word that flashed along the Anglo's cables ;
The rustic messenger, on painted wheel,
  Who found his rabid father in the stables ;
The instant cash which answered his appeal ;
  The unfilled promise of his mother's sables ;
The dread recalling wire, ' Thou shalt not tarry on
With Mrs. Vermont, Susie, Mame, or Marion.'

Reader, of thy compassion, pause and weep !
  Weep for a puppy prodigal, returning,
Over the bosom of the wine-dark deep,
  To face parental anger justly burning !
Yet—when *thy* cards seem fair and bets are steep,
  With tutored eyes the danger-point discerning,
Heed thou the solemn warning of the bard :—
' *Beware of him who draws the single card !* '

CANTO IX

We who drink deep from that Pierian spring
  Whose well no split infinitives pollute,
Delight in rose- and rue-flower's blossoming,
  In lips entwined and passion's purple fruit;
Yet themes there be whence never bard may wring
  The needful lilt, howe'er attuned his flute:
And here must I, in spite of all I've quaffed,
Decline to versify the overdraft.

The Muses wept, the halls of song were dumb,
  When Jack returned to face paternal ire.
Euterpe ceased to ply the plucking thumb;
  Erato paled before that angry sire;
Clio was mute; Melpomene sat mum;
  Calliope flung down her tingling lyre.
Bereft of Heliconian afflatus,
I leave that scene one hideous hiatus.

Mayhap 'tis better so: sith nary printer
Mote set in Caslon-fount of Cheltenham Bold,
The oaths the old man sware—he was no stinter
Of Anglo-Saxon curses manifold;
For he had gat him motors twain that winter,
The which had robbed him of much hoarded gold,
And David George with itching fingers pressed
Right heftily upon his landed chest.

Eftsoons, methinks, by loss of lucre blinded,
Had he cut off the waster with a shilling—
As fathers do—as chancely, reader, thine did—
And so put speedy end to this my trilling:
Save, in his own son's sin, was he reminded
Of his lost youth, and that triennial billing
Which every undergraduate of mettle
Expected his progenitors to settle.

Thus he forgave; with well-weighed words anent
The heinous wickedness of them that gamble:
A sely discourse, plentiful besprent
With eldy saw, with proverb and preamble;
Proving how noble roof-trees had been shent
And vast demesnes left bare to brier and bramble,
Because, forsooth, the heirs of honoured names
Had set no limit to their 'little' games.

So a full hour the heavy father stormed :
  But when he deemed the truant's conscience raxed
And by such eloquences aye reformed,
  To kindlier thoughts and welcoming relaxed.
The study-fire his homespun coat-tails warmed,
  Parental ardour in his bosom waxed,
The while he beamed upon his boy ; and told
Of birds and foxes slain, and long putts holed.

Straightway appeared mamma, and kissed the sinner ;
  And, though she bade prepare no fatted calf,
Since she opined her first-born looking thinner,
  Decreed Sanatogen for him to quaff ;
And sent him bedwards shortly after dinner.
  Then spake the beldame to her better half
Warnings and words of counsel, ending thus :
' Meseems 'twere better an he stayed with us.'

The which her lord approved, and so decided :
  And all that night, upon her wakeful bed,
She conned the damsels Devonshire provided
  In ample numbers for her boy to wed—
Them that by Shute and Axminster resided,
  And them that Exevale's stately mansions bred ;
Wondering if haply marriage in precocity
Would cure her darling's tendence to velocity.

Right many moons amongst the western queans
  Abode my Jack, a prey to each convention;
Breasting the tea-fight's surge, or at the Dean's
  Daring the mid-day meal-time's dull distension.
'Twixt Gertrudes, Constances and Geraldines
  He proved the cause of many a dissension;
Being forfain to woo with equal fire
All Atalantas of that festive shire.

Now sith there ruled, upon that countryside,
  Of marriageable men great scarcitie,
He was a welcomed caller far and wide
  By every landed dame of high degree;
And every rival daughtered-matron tried,
  With tennis-party and with picnic tea,
From Exeter, yea even unto Ottery,
To draw this *gros lot* of the marriage-lottery . . .

Yet gat small benefits to pay their trouble.
  Whereat the county did malignly scoff—
Seeing how fancy-free Jack trod the stubble
  Or set his courser at the on-and-off;
Or ventured at the bridgeing to redouble,
  Spite the wan curate's deprecating cough;
Or smote the topmost phasiant that rocketed;
And never once his mashie-shots y-socketed.

Still, though he cleaved to none, it did befall,
  The Ladye Alice pleased him more than most.
Eke fayre was she, and passing rich withal;
  A hugey dowery was hers to boast.
Blue eyes she had, to hold a page in thrall;
  And whitest hands, to pass his tea and toast,
Or pour from Fortune's teeming cornucopia
The lavish bounty of her philanthropia.

She was that orphan-heiress of the Grange,
  Last of a flavoured line of cocoa-makers,
Whose sonless sire, apprised by dreams full strange
  Of mausoleums and of undertakers,
Had bartered twenty trade-marks in exchange
  For twice ten thousand incremented acres—
Whereon he died in peace, ne sought to vie
With Messers Tibble, Cadbury, or Fry.

She was not one of those swift damozels
  That have their joy in the unseemly jest—
Yclept 'the smack and tickle'; froward belles
  That in the apple-pie-bed take much zest;
Or down ye bannisteres, with ribald yells,
  Delight to glide, right scantilie bedressed:
Which conduct, spite of Father Vaughan's rebukes,
Men say be practised at my friend the Duke's.

They twain had played at sweethearts long ago,
  Perched on the giant rhododendron's limb;
Had plighted baby-troth where kingcups grow,
  Or ever Eton had rejected him,
Or ever he had been false Amy's beau,
  The storm-tossed child of Aphrodite's whim:
And now the cherished playmate of Jack's youth
Was like to be his sweetheart in good sooth.

As yet he loved not; only thought her grace
  And gentleness delightful in comparison
With thick-boot Dians of the otter-chace,
  Who simpered at the subs of any garrison.
Grangewards he sauntered often, till his pace
  Was marked no longer by the ban-dog's warison.
Which, since the Ladye's lands and theirs did touch,
Gladdened and gratified his mother much.

Heigh-ho! Amidst those green Devonian hills
  A cunning siren dwelt, most crafty-wise
To snatch their Jacks away from honest Jills;
  Who, weening well that on his pa's demise
This Jack would have withal to pay the bills
  Of her desiring, secret did devise,
With awful arts of grammarye and malice,
To wrest from him the unsuspecting Alice.

A low-voiced charmer, specious, subtle, svelte;
  Of pretty purring ways she had great store.
To her in love, God wot, had many knelt;
  And scalps of half the country-side she wore
Adangle from her patent-leather belt;
  Having no small acquaintance with that lore
By which too-trustful youngsters are entrapped.
Aye in her arms, a nasty Pom-dog yapped.

From early morn to setting of the sun
  Would she make sport of them she had enslaved,
Saying in public: 'Nay! with such an one
  Would I not dance, though mightily he craved;'
Or else: 'To him I did but say in fun
  "Moustaches please me not"—and lo! he
    shaved;'
Or: 'He was *so* depressed to go away,
I *had* to let him hold my hand to-day.'

Whenas a maid of this especial shape
  Doth cast on witless wight the gladsome eyne,
Doth greet with silvery laugh his eldest jape,
  And now appear to yield, and now decline;
Unless some fairy compass his escape,
  One day she pounceth as the peregrine,
And hales her prey, before he's thought things over,
To the Lord Warden hostelrie at Dover.

Upon my boy this scheming Circe set
  Such fell and potent spells of amorous power
As gat him gentle Alice to forget,
  Whom erst he loved: and from that very hour,
Unending afternoons, or fine or wet,
  He spent at dalliance in her baleful bower;
Until, from Dumpton's Hill to Dartmoor's goyles,
Men said: 'Behold him, in that wench's toils!'

Nathless had she attained by wheedling wile,
  To be the châtelaine of those wide lands
That stretch from Exmouth, mile on deep-loamed mile,
  To Newton Poppleford and Sidmouth's sands;
Had not Jack's mother seen the siren-smile,
  And guessed the greediness of siren-hands:
Thinking, 'I wot not whence the witch's kin come,
But well I ken her insufficient income.'

And so contrived, with Machiavellian mutter,
  Recondite, cabalistic ways of those
That rule our English wapentakes, to utter
  The word that bans a maiden. She did gloze
About her till the county almost cut her—
  For she had several stern mammas to foes
In consequence of injuries their strapping
Daughters had suffered from the like kidnapping.

But she was wise, that aged watchful dame,
Nor rowelled too deep the opposition spur;
Hers was too fine a knowledge of the game,
To set youth's latent chivalry astir—
Which oft resulteth in a parent's grame;
As witness they who, seeking to deter
Some love-lorn whelp from home-intriguer's tricks,
Have hurled him headlong to the Maids of Hicks.

So thuswise she inquired if it would bore
Her son to undertake, at her expense,
A pilgrimage unto that Gare du Nord
Whither good Yankees flit when they go hence.
'Fain would she go herself,' quoth she, 'but sore
Dreaded the journey's inconvenience:
Yet, an he would not, then must she, for there
His sister lived, a homesick *pensionnaire*.'

Who would not leave the trickiest of tweeded
Charmers to languish in her Joyous Gard,
And fare, with all the *billets* that he needed,
Where Maxim's revellers madden, many-starred?
Not Jack! He girded up his trunks, and speeded
Far from the temptress that his parents barred.
She, to escape her from the social pillory,
Wedded a ponderous Colonel of Artillery.

CANTO X

PARIS, my Paris! City of the plain
  Who yet contrive to look exceeding fair;
Where every winter sees the same old Seine
  Amaze afresh the outraged *Commissaire!*
Eleusis of the Wizards who ordain
  Whether discreetly swathed or boldly bare
Shall march the laughing ladies, frilled and frivolly,
Adown the colonnaded Rue de Rivoli!

Acropolis of evanescent modes,
  Whence awesome Doeuillet flings his mandate far;
Where, dreadly delphic, Carlier forebodes
  The season's *chapeaux* to the Redmayne'd star;
And Grünwaldt's silver foxes draw, like lodes,
  The Cincinnati girl and her mamma!
Temple, whose *mannequins* see last year's boon-
Companion on his this year's honeymoon!

I love the sunshine on thy Place Vendôme;
Thy hatless *midinettes*, demurely tripping;
Thy *vieux marcheurs*, in gauntlets polychrome,
Their monocles from wrinkled sockets slipping;
Thy *bourgeoises* and thy *mondaines* and thy *mômes;*
Thy suave attendants, eloquent of tipping;
Thy *Boursiers*, with measured tread and slow,
Seeking their matutinal *riz-de-veau.*

Still—Thou, whose absinthe helps the lagging stanza,
Whose twelve-franc wine outsparkles that of Perth;
Dearer to me than Bursley-town or Hansa;
Wife of no nation; Mistress of the earth;
Ultima Thule of the crazed; Bonanza
Of every jewel that decks the mouth of mirth!—
Mine, though a worshipper, must be the task
Of rending from thee thy dissembling mask.

For thou before the world dost take thy stand
As a vast charnel-house of fleshly sin;
Whose shameless inmates dance a saraband
To fleece the feckless of their facile tin;
While vice and vitriol walk hand-in-hand,
And Trilbies flaunt the unprotected skin,
Where man drops down life's ladder, rung by rung,
And Sascha-Toni catches Filson young.

Such is thy pose! but we, not undiscerning
The scant veneer which o'er each deal is laid,
In thee descry the avid merchant, yearning
For grosser profits and expanding trade.
Thy goblets fill, thy nights see day returning,
Thy girls flash past in satins and brocade . . .
And each fresh victim serves but to enhance
The vaulted millions of the Banque de France.

Yea! we, who know thee from the halls of Ritz
To where the Néant rears fantastic tapers;
Who quaff the Chatham's ante-prandial splits
And curse the lateness of the English papers,
What time our spouse, the livelong morning, flits
With dwindling purse 'twixt milliners and drapers;
We, who have supped with Pougy—and Polaire,
(In dim, dead days when she deigned do her hair);

We, that have sampled every recreation
From Bullier's *belles* to Foyot's sizzling *crêpes;*
That greet with understanding cachinnation
The loves of Mistinguette and Dearly's jape;
We—if at times we yield to thy temptation—
Perceive no less, how lash and lock and shape
And amorous mouth and every naughty way,
Are attitudes, assumed because they pay.

Yet are we songsters bound, by mystic rite
  Stricter than any Medic lore or Persian,
That, soon as at the Gare du Nord alight
  The travelled heroes of our book's excursion,
We do conduct them through the fluffsome night
  Unto the scene of each decreed diversion;
Without whose powerful aid, our *magnum opus*
Becomes a most unsaleable octopus.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

In Paillard's halls the violins are thrilling,
  Bortsch's and bisque's uncovered fumes entice;
Champagne from Jeroboams is distilling
  Its argent spume upon the salted ice;
Here some red *langouste* crinkles from the grilling,
  There weeps a baby-lambkin's piteous slice;
Here Claude's own self, our gastronomic Shah,
Counsels the diners to his costliest *plats*.

The lamps shine soft on silverware and napery;
  Fond couples murmur, laughing as they sip;
Smooth shoulders glisten, rustles scented drapery;
  The peach bloom's velvet brushes velvet lip.
Reek of Havanas rises, blue and vapoury,
  To gilded ceils where fat-limbed Cupids trip
And faintly from the Boulevards one may guess
The newsmen's raucous clamouring, '*La Presse*.'

But who is this, in waistcoat of the whitest,
At whose Lucullian fiat waiters spread
The damask's gloss ? on whom thy grin politest,
O monarch of the *maîtres d'hôtel*, is shed.
And who his fere, in Poiret hobble tightest,
A nodding aigrette on her *chi-chi'd* head ?
Alas for boyhood's fickleness, alack !
The gay Lothario is mine hero Jack.

Forgot, the maids of nature's own complexion—
His Alice, and the Siren of the Shire ;
Gone from the purview of his recollection,
The wordy warnings of his worthy sire ;
The shapely sharer of his rich refection
Tinges his fancy with her phallic fire.
Day after day his weeping sister waits
His promised visit, at the *pension* gates.

Helen, poor homesick Helen, thy duress
Must be consoled by fellow *pensionnaires.*
Sob on the bosom of the *sous-maîtresse* ;
Munch the wan *gaufrette* at the Neuilly fair ;
Solace, with Eve's or Aminte's tenderness,
The heart that pants for your neglectful *frère* !
Small need has he of sisters, who has met
The fascinating, frivolous Triquette !

Their looks flash understanding, as they meet
Across the lifted beaker's clinking brim;
From feathered turban to attractive feet,
Her trained perfection is a lure to him;
Sweet her expressive hands, and doubly sweet
The crimson of her lithe lips, pouting-prim,
That scarcely part to poise incarnadine
Upon the breaking bubbles of the wine.

The aureate hour of after-dinner closes
In wafted spirals of upcurling smoke;
Dreaming, her glance holds his across the roses,
Too keen to lull, too melting to provoke.
Banishing dreams, the *vestiaire* apposes
His sombre gibus and her sable cloak;
Follows the verdant *chassseur* in her train:
'Le taxi! et les billets d'avant-scène!'

Along the lighted ways the auto purrs;
Wrapped in its warden gloom, abide the lovers.
Pink on her breast, uprising from the furs,
Rest the twin corals large as eggs of plovers:
And Djerkiss perfumes all that hair of hers.
Praise to thee, driver, tactfullest of 'shuvvers'!
The diplomatic neck thou dost not turn,
Shall make thy pouch with double *pourboire* burn!

I too will imitate thee, nor unveil
The sanctuary of thy limousine :
For if Triquette be rather kind and frail
Than wise ; and if Chartreuse's cloying green,
Enmixed with Moët from the frozen pail,
Quickens my hero's blood ; 'twere well to screen,
From vulgar gaze, those lips and hands adoring . . .
Moreover, others' love-affairs wax boring.

'*Mais sois donc sage !*' the clinging lips implore ;
The hands unclasp ; and jarring grind the brakes.
A deferential porter swings the door.
'*Merci, monsieur*'—the sphinx-like chauffeur takes
The proffered coin ; anew his engines roar ;
Soon in some *brasserie* his thirst he slakes.
But they, across the carpet's yielding pile,
Pass to their *loge* along the crowded aisle.

In regal state, observed of stage and stall,
They sit to watch Arlette d'Orgère displaying
Her shapely hose ; or hear De Sousa call
The circling pigeons from their fluttered straying ;
Sharp on their ears the cadenced couplets fall,
That twit Lepine with Steinheil's shrouded slaying ;
Anon, the butt of truly Gallic quips,
Adown the boards a phantom Sarah trips.

For them the Apaches ply the mimic strife;
L'ami de Madame emulates Asmodeus;
And, keen as razor-edge of surgeon's knife,
Cuts the appalling persiflage of Claudius.
(Whereat the gaping Briton's scholar-wife,
'Tom dear, come home! the show is simply odious.'
They rise—and lo! or e'er she leaves her seat,
The final chorus blares its tuneful beat.)

Compère and *Commère* make their parting bow;
The curtain drops upon the packed *coulisses.*
The footlights darkle suddenly; and now,
Attendants claim their *petit bénéfice*—
Paid with good grace, if earned none knoweth how.
Broods over box and parterre, sheeted peace.
Without, the Place Blanche hums, and pampered *poupées*
Whirl, taxi-borne, to amicable *soupers.*

The choicest table at L'Abbaye Thélème,
Reserved long since, awaits our turtles' pleasure.
There, in the sofaed circle known to fame,
Coaxed by the strains of Andalusian measure,
Truite bleu they taste and *foie-gras* pink as flame,
With the cool *mousse-de-jambon's* aspicked treasure:
While Triquette lisps, '*Mon cheri, c'est atroce,*
Tu sais, nous faisons tous les soirs la noce.'

Around them swirls the *dèmi-monde*, chaotic,
Feathers and pearls and perfumes, rouge and lace :
Gaby, consoler of the boy despotic—
An English Guardsman takes the monarch's place ;
Lucy et Jeanne, *amitié* erotic ;
And tiny Cleo with the flawless face.
There, whiskered Willy drains the whisky peg,
Accompanied of perfect-moulded Meg.

Here Pimprinette holds court to her admirers ;
An arch archduke amazes his attaché ;
Regina, scantiest of stage attirers,
Fingers the cord of her embroidered *sachet ;*
A Yankee dollar-lord brings twin Sapphiras ;
A *jeune marquis* confers St. Germain's cachet.
Loudly they bid newcomers ' *Chapeau ! Chapeau !* '
And quaff the ageless glass of sugared ' *Drapeau.*'

Strike, strike the 'cello ! Thunder the bassoon !
Drain to the dregs each ardent alcoholic !
Launch to the shining dome your flagged balloon !
Let the coiled serpentine whiz parabolic !
Hark to Pepito's stamping rigadoon,
The *Gitanella's* finger-snapping frolic !
Remember what these cheery evenings cost,
Nor cavil if the merriment be forced !

Faster the music throbs ; and soon, uproarious,
On the cleared floor the revellers twist and twirl.
Crushed are the plumes of Heitz-Boyer the glorious,
With lordly Lentheric's unfastened curl.
Far from his Faubourg's cynosure censorious,
Observe the *marquis* with Regina whirl !
See with what skill the girls on whom he dotes,
Relieve that Yankee of his surplus notes !

But maddest midst the mazy mass gyrating,
Revolve Triquette and her enamoured Briton ;
Cheeks overflushed and steely eyes dilating,
Tell half the world how deeply he is smitten ;
While she, not all unversed in men and mating,
Snuggles to him—the cupboard-loving kitten.
Dance on, my Jack, and learn, ere top lip thatches,
The price of mastering a kitten's scratches !

Fevered and free the close-clung one-step sways,
Unending bottles pour their foaming rain ;
Rises before youth's sight that golden haze
Which brings the morning headache in its train.
In raptured bliss, *le Locataire* surveys
Madame whose sure hands calculate his gain ;
Thinking how one more year, or two at most,
Shall see him leisured on the Azure Coast.

It is enough! The dancers' feet grow weary;
Our tired conductor slants his drooping bow.
Comes now *l'addition*, comes the fruitless query.
See! one by one, the couples cloak and go.
Hark! Down the stairway, intermittent, eerie,
Across the murk the shrilling whistles blow.
It is the moment, sportsman, to beware
The vehicle *de luxe*, the trebled fare!

Good-night, Regina! Pimprinette, good-night!
A poet's blessing on your several slumbers!
Willy, *bon soir!* may no dread dreams affright
The couch Claudine-Colette no more encumbers!
Sleep sound, my Meg, and wake refreshed, to write
A new 'Priscilla' for the Tatler's numbers!
Lucy, *à bientot! Au revoir*, Gaby!
I would be gone, 'tis far too late for me.

And fare you well, my headstrong hero-boy!
Break not for me the tenor of your *soirée!*
You and the night are young—prolong your joy,
With yon sleek puss-cat panoplied of Poiret!
But I am done with pallid morns, and coy
To throats entwined of diamond-dusted *moiré:*
I, that so often painted Paris red,
Do now prefer to seek an early bed.

But you, what time my wheels departing fret
  Down the Rue Pigalle's seven-kissing slope,
Search out with your unchaperoned Triquette—
  Freed from the custody of watchful trope—
Those halls where pleasure thrills her minions yet,
  Where the Rat Mort's rag-timing Ethiope
Dins in one's ears the *ave atque vale*
Of Mabel Jones and undomestic Bailey!

What if, long since, Maxim's imposing porter
  Has barred his threshold to the public throng?
Gold is the key to shuttered stones and mortar:
  Pay! and ye pass the hidden ways along!
Or bid the auto bear you to that quarter
  Where, to the blare of band and crash of song
The painted *Paquefleurettes* and *vieux Satyres*
Dance the *machiché* at the Bar Palmyre.

Warm, shall the Nox-Bar's welcome be, and attic,
  Thence, as the dawn-light deepens, ye may stroll,
Arm linked in arm, uneloquent, ecstatic,
  To break the early-oped *boulanger's* roll;
Or watch the revellers whirling still, lymphatic,
  In the dim portals of the 'Boneless Sole';
When flares and dies the flame of *Phares Ducellier*,
And *midinettes* return to their *ateliers*.

Farewell, and fear not! I shall ne'er disclose
  The orbit nor the goal of your careering.
My chaste inspirer caters not for those
  That love the lurid detail, lewdly leering.
So we will woo Castalian repose;
  And, to the 'Terminus' sedately veering,
Leave you with your Parisian Aspasia.
Once more—good-night! and trust to our aphasia!

CANTO XI

Muse mine, our pleasant *Wanderjahr* is over;
To charted seas the epic shallop turns.
See, on the sky-line drear, the cliffs of Dover,
With Spiers and Pond's unsatisfying urns!
Sinks not your heart with mine, Bohemian rover,
To watch the wake that ever-widening churns
'Twixt us and Silver Towers of shattered *canetons*,
And forfeit orgies at the Café Hanneton?

This is indeed the finish of our travelling,
Of every foreign trick of trope and trove.
'Tis hard to find fresh cantos and fresh cavilling,
When once the anchor drops in homeland cove
And no new byway waits a bard's unravelling;
Not though he plumb the depths of Westbourne Grove,
Or strike his lyre where Kensingtonians prance
Through the debauch of a subscription dance.

Come, let us tread with mincing step and wary,
Upon the asphalte of our native heath!
We must walk delicately, and be chary
To draw our bladed satire from its sheath,
Here—where the frailest, free'st-supping fairy
Dons unabashed the strawberry-petalled wreath;
And each toothed belle at whom we fain would scoff,
May be the morrow's bride of some tall toff.

Here, twice ten thousand legal lights observe us;
Brief their retort to libel, brief to slander.
Here Bull on Bull with lowered horns make nervous,
And Carter bells his dudgeoned client's dander;
Lewis is here, with Lewis, to disverve us;
Friend Withers withereth poetic candour,
Crying: 'Beware! From Gospel Oak to Gamage's,
A million litigants are out for damages.'

Aroint ye, lawyers! Fearless we'll intone
Each risk and rapture of our hero's path;
From the first hoisting of the danger-cone,
E'en to the billed and bilious aftermath;
All his foregatherings with them that drone
Their wastrel ways 'twixt Supper Club and Bath;
And how he fell, a second Polydorus,
Before a Polymnestrix of the Chorus.

But first, my fighting Muse, in peaceful vein
  Praise we the 'stablished custom of our lands
Which doth decree that whosoe'er attain
  Their fifth and fatal *lustra*, no commands
Of sire, trustee, nor guardian restrain
  From taking manhood's checks in boyhood's hands–
To double hearts, to back the chancy winner,
Or give the supper-cat her Sunday dinner.

'Twas thus for Jack the feast had been prepared,
  The neighbours and the tenantry invited;
The soup, the cider and the sirloin shared;
  The troth of overlord and yeoman plighted:
What time the territorial brasses blared,
  And punctual rents were royally requited.
Of which festivities, the D.E.G.
Blazoned the tidings to the West Countree.

E'en so he launched, immaculately shaven,
  Girt in the manly toga Scholte-built,
From out the minor's law-protected haven;
  And sailed his keel across Life's sifting silt.
Dark, the clouds lowered above him; hoarse, the raven
  Croaked in his cordage, harbinger of guilt;
And the Muse followed on insistent wings,
To see him make a shocking mess of things.

Know ye that block of residential flats
  Hard by the palace of debentured Gillow,
Where never porters in embroidered hats
  Spy upon youth's nocturnal peccadillo;
But some discreetly-silent valet pats
  The merry bachelor's unslept-on pillow;
Where the lifts rise attendantless, and rents
Are far beyond a scald's emoluments?

There, where the vagrant sunbeams somehow wreathe
  A strangled coil or two athwart the grime,
High o'er the surging city's drone and seethe,
  Sojourned my wanderer one summer-time.
Thence, on a night when June the Jade did breathe
  Upon the heart of marchioness and mime,
Down Regent Street his open taxi flashed
Unto the fane of Genée and Kyasht.

For well he played the hazard of the Wheel
  And gave the odds to Fate's impending zero:
Thou knowest, Truefitt, how he sought thy steel,
  His overdue account, his ready cheero;
Thou too, lion-hearted Joe, did'st see him streel
  To thy fierce junkets at the Trocadero;
And was he not, when sager folk flocked bedwards,
Of thine Empire a citizen, George Edwardes?

Upon the Promenade, that eve in June,
He was the only nux amidst the nuces,
Who seemed to have no zest in tune nor rune
That commonly to merriment conduces.
As one who on the morrow weds, immune
To arts of little Evas and of Lucys,
He paid not, though on every side besought,
The least lone glasslet of Platonic port.

'To-night they were to meet! How could he mix
With them whose heads were cosmetiqued and glossy,
With vapid Vyvys and with drivelling Dicks
Who cracked the ancient jibe with ancient Flossie?'
Blind to the Muscovitish dancer's kicks,
Deaf to the Dago blast of Bucalossi,
To him the Oxford manner's scornful 'Rot'
Was as the silly subaltern's 'What-What'.

'Twixt bar and bar the boy perambulated,
Squirrelwise, round and round, an hour perhaps;
Displeased to find his progress punctuated
With 'Hello, Jack's, with 'How de do, old chap's,
With whiskies proffered and reciprocated.
His shoulders shrank beneath the friendly slaps
Of such as deemed true social intercourse
A mingling of the barleycorn and force.

Before the flickered bioscope had started,
  Leaving the purple haunts of painted ladies,
Adown the steps to Leicester Square he darted—
  Heedless of Globeward-bound Scheherazades.
Straight at his word the Gamage-Bell departed,
  Hearkened the chauffeur to his 'Drive like Hades';
Forgetting '*chi va piano, va lontano,*'
He gained thy copper porticoes, Romano.

Waited him Charlie, Norman line's survival;
  And Herbert, brewer-baronet's descendant.
But where were Phyllis Edge, and Eve St. Ival?
  And Doris D'Arcy, famous for the pendant
With which the Rajah routed every rival?
  Vainly they questioned waiter and attendant . . .
When lo! that instant, through the glassy portals
Burst the three goddesses to sup with mortals.

Arose shrill chattering. 'So sorry, Charlie.'
  'Fancy! the guv'nor was in front to-night,
And so we had to wait for the finale!'
  'My dear, I'm simply dying for a bite.'
'It wasn't our fault, *really;* don't be snarly!'
  'Aren't we just late though?' 'Is my hair all
    right?
We got into our things in such a hurry
I hadn't time to brush it, in my flurry.'

Then down the room, surveyed of each beholder,
Swept the swift sextet to their alcove-table.
Luigi's own self, with courtly-bending shoulder,
Decreed their Magnum's vintage and its label;
Charged the wine-waiter ice it even colder;
Bade one bring melon—and amid the babel
Of all the Gaiety and half the Lyric,
Withdrew to universal panegyric.

Dust, is the fame, Romano's! and the glory
Of them that feasted in your Roman's reign!
Married, your mightiest; or, all too hoary,
To Eustace Miles their gouty course is ta'en.
Though the screened couples in your upper storey
Still hear the cork pop and the laugh inane;
Though, in your luncheon-hour, a man may spy
Some few survivors of great days gone-by;

No more within your arabesques foregather
The men and women of the lusty yore.
'Neath frescoed horrors, flaccid flappers blather;
The bounder bounds, uncurbed, upon your floor
And feeble faces, innocent of lather,
Mock at the ghosts of them that supped before.
Not such, was Jack! the thrill of things æstival
Fired every nerve in him for Eve St. Ival.

She was no pallid picture-postcard smiler;
Red, the hot blood through all her pulses ran—
Red as her hair; a dangerous Delilah,
Skilled to treat man as boy, or boy as man;
Sweet, when it served, as caramel of Huyler;
Bitter to those she held beneath her ban.
Full on the lad, in valuing surmise,
She bent the keen gaze of her expert eyes.

'So you are Jack,' she said. 'I've heard so much
Of you, from Doris and the other girls.'
She paused awhile, and with a master-touch
Smoothed the rebellion of her auburn curls:
Then archly added, 'Phyllis says you're such
A real good sport. Do you admire her pearls?
Almost as good as Gertie's, aren't they? Herbert!
Perhaps I will just take a little turbot.'

Yet once again she turned to him. 'I hear
That you're so clever. Mostly, men I know
Are quite *too* stupid. Charlie is a dear,
Of course; and so is Herbert—but they're slow.
Now I like clever men. I say, it's queer
I haven't ever seen you at our show.'
'But I've seen you,' quoth Jack. Eve answered coyly.
'I like your hair; most chaps wear theirs *so* oily.'

Screened by her whole artillery alluring,
The bold invader tested every track:
With reek of scent, with flash of manicuring,
Her charming squadrons flew to the attack:
Now pert, now proud, now rude, now reassuring,
She strove to captivate, and capture, Jack:
While he, as was his wont to tactics tender,
Lowered his voice in token of surrender.

Band above, played 'The Orchid'; and thereunder,
Quail followed turbot, peaches followed quail.
Fragrant, the coffee steamed; and ah! the wonder
To feel its warmth ere lights began to fail,
Ere every Chloe made her boy refund her
That coin—bereft of which, none dare assail
Those curtained courts where silver mirrors stand
And the chained lip-salve mocks the pilfering hand.

Pink, the lamps gleamed on Eve's delicious throat;
Gleamed on the tendrils of each tress aclamber
About her tiny ears; to rubies smote
Her name endiamonded upon the amber
Of tube between her lips; flushed Cypriote
The marble curves from nape to shoulder's camber.
Before the roseate magic she exhaled,
The charms of Phyllis and of Doris paled.

'Twas not to them Jack hinted: 'We might sup
Alone, one night when you've got nothing doing.'
'Twas not for them he overset his cup,
In the excitement of his whispered wooing.
He uttered not of them: 'I'll pick you up
And see you home'; nor was it their pooh-poohing,
Their pensive and recalcitrant demeanour,
That made his protestations all the keener.

'Twas Eve that knew how supper, once declined,
Works more than many motor-rides to Skindles;
How youth soon wearies of the proffered rind,
But hotly for withholden fruit enkindles—
Burning that flame to deities unkind,
Which on the altars of acceptance dwindles.
'Twas Eve that played him, as men play the luce,
Till waning midnight bade her call a truce.

Now England's curfew tolled with equal doom
The knell of all who plied the licensed trade.
Vain matches sputtered through the smoky room,
As the scarce-scrutinised accounts were paid.
Vague shapes moved softly; gorgeous in the gloom,
Rustled and clinked each homeward-heading maid.
Lingered a remnant; querulous to these,
One spake unceasing: 'Gentlemen! Time, please!!'

Last to depart, cajoled, upbraided, chidden,
Jack and his party dawdled in the hall.
Cloaked, the three charmers stood—their outlines hidden
In musquash pelt and velvet's masking pall.
Tipped, was the page; one portly porter bidden
For taxis twain with might and main to call;
His fellow-Magog's hardly slimmer form
Sped off in quest of Miss St. Ival's brougham.

The taxis ticked, the brougham arrived—yet loth,
Each girl appeared, to tear herself away.
Phyllis pecked Doris; Eve embraced them both;
Many a futile word they found to say.
The staid old coachman, with a muttered oath,
Restrained the nervous mare's impatient play;
Cursing, beneath his deferential breath,
'Females wot works a 'orse and man to death.'

The moments fled—and still farewells unending
Flowed from sweet lips; while waiting cavaliers
Fretted and fumed in vain; while, bedward-wending,
The muftied waiters passed to humbler spheres.
At last, to each a white-gloved hand extending,
Eve spake the final 'Well, good-night, my dears.'
Her brougham shot forward 'neath a double load . . .
And bore my hero to Acacia Road.

Down the quiet Strand, across Trafalgar Square,
Thundered the hooves; the Carlton flared no longer;
Wide-windowed Clubland listened to the mare
Clattering down Pall Mall's deserted donga;
And with each stride her mistress was aware
Of Jack's desire for kisses, growing stronger.
Her instinct knew each thought of his devising,
Her soul condemned him for unenterprising.

On, up St. James's Street, to Piccadilly;
Never a word the watchful maiden spake
Save once, a soft-reproving 'Don't be silly'
When he essayed her hand in his to take.
Light is the rose to pluck, and light the lily,
But hard—too hard for novice arms to break—
The prickly stalk that carries, falsely prim,
The everlasting-flower of stage-girl's whim.

Now through Park Lane the rubbered circles rolled,
And Eve, relaxing, murmured: 'I'm so weary.'
Her dyed head drooped upon the velvet's fold;
Her rouged lips sighed, that erst had been so cheery.
'Twas then her comrade, waxing overbold,
Obeyed the counselling of Peter Keary.
Too late! Who kisses not, when *first* he may—
When kiss he would, resenting virgins flay!

She rose in wrath. 'I was a fool,' she said,
'To think that you were different from the rest.
Do you suppose, because I've just been fed
At your expense, I'm yours upon request?'
Flicked by her stinging words, the angry red
Flushed up beneath Jack's pallor's palimpsest:
Where older rakes had never cared a damn bit,
He was too young to recognise the gambit.

Too young to guess such anger merely feigned,
The languor but a sensuous device—
Or know the fierce-eyed pantheress unchained
Purrs, to *correct* caressing, in a trice—
He frowned where raillery had served; disdained
The half-heard 'After all, you're rather nice.'
Offended, throbbed his breast beneath its starch;
Heedless of Angel or of Marble—Arch.

But low laughed Eve to mark the stripling's rage;
Nor found the signs of temperament displeasing.
She sensed the coming joys of tutelage,
The facile firing and the facile freezing;
The jewelled tributes he must pay, as gage
For trivial boons; the rich rewards of teasing:
And quoth, regardful of the end in sight:
'One day, I'll let you kiss me; not to-night!'

Between them, silence fell. The brougham shot on
  Past sleepy terraces to Finchley Road
And Hebrew Vales of Outer-Babylon.
  From rigid Jehu's back the buttons glowed.
Lord's gloomed against their vision, and was gone;
  Greyly on either side the pavements flowed;
When this their world was noiseless as the grave,
It did seem such a pity to behave!

And yet they did. Not even at the last
  Kissed they, when key-in-hand the temptress stood;
Not even when, those iris orbs upcast,
  She spoke the fond 'Good-night, dear, and be
    good.'
He raised his hat; beyond her ken he passed,
  Into the depths of the Johnsonian Wood;
And as he passed, upon the sky was born
The first faint flushing of another dawn.

CANTO XII

'Tis fine to drink the founts of learning dry,
By Oriel's Quads or Balliol's shaven closes;
To browse away the morn upon that 'High'
Where parti-coloured every New man's hose is;
Fine, with the 'House's' bloodlings, to decry
The Magdalen faces and the Brazen noses . . .
And yet, to them that wish for wider knowledge,
Our London teaches more than any College.

Not Jowett, Jebb, nor suchlike Dons renowned,
Settled the courses of Jack's education;
But *belle donne*, exquisitely gowned,
Primed him in corset-lectures on flirtation.
At board and hall wise mistresses he found,
Who preached the Law by precept and probation;
And Caution's Curve was hinted to him starkly
By delicate divorcées at the Berkeley.

Mayfairies walked him through Platonic mazes,
  Belgravias warned him of West Hampstead's wines;
Slade-students showed how unconventional phrases
  May lead to crises when a minx repines.
Chez Scott, he met and mastered mayonnaises;
  Chez Kettner, knelt to velvet-setteed shrines;
Was coached to snatch the snack 'twixt rub and rub
By the Free-Fooders of the Auction Club.

And one was there, a dealer in finesse,
  Victrix of many an over-doubling bout,
An unprotected spinster—none the less
  No prey of such as risk the slim 'Without.'
She could discard a heart with sure address,
  Or put the proffered diamond to rout;
And of her words that club was gey afraid,
Knowing her wont to call a spade, a spade.

Cora, men named her; '*Carpe*' was her motto.
  Hers were the wiles that Prévost first construed.
Hers was a basement-flat's brocaded grotto;
  Hers was the yielding pose that masks the prude.
Spite of a neck as pillar carved of Giotto,
  Of naughty mouth, and love-locks sable-hued,
A maiden—chill as any of the cloisters;
If not above free caviar and oysters.

Her morning movements, who might follow them—
  The shopping stroll, the telephonic babble ?
For her, real day commenced at four P.M.
  When the bridge-rooms were opened to the rabble
Of shuffling harpies and the tribes of Shem ;
  When the arch-priestesses of gibble-gabble,
Laises of the pack and dummy Jaels,
Fought for the favours of limacine males.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Jack! were they true, the things the old cats spake
  Of you and her ? Or merely evil rumour ?
Were you so doltish as to undertake
  The thankless *rôle* of them that cash the stumer,
To let your slender patrimony slake
  The many wants of Cora's captious humour ?
For so they said, with comments tart and galling;
Till Clubland hearkened to their caterwauling.

Hearkened—to Miss Delaine, what time she hinted
  Yours was the purse whence Cora's debts were
    paid ;
Wondering, aloud, how one who erst had stinted,
  Now boasted Paquin models and a maid.
(Poor Miss Delaine! *her* mop was Titian-tinted,
  Though the roots turned at times a darker shade;
While Cora's coal-black coils shone quite her own . . .
Hence, peradventure, the embittered tone !)

There, there, my fool! A truce to your protesting
I realise the two of you were blameless;
Nor would I probe your methods of investing
Those checks for which the counterfoils are nameless.
Hag Rumour lied, for sure. The Muse was jesting;
She wots that these Bridge-harridans be shameless.
We *do* believe—our hands as your security—
That Cora was a paragon of purity.

Still, for the future, child—*experto crede*—
Shun the mixed card-club as you shun the asp!
For there the ancient wrangle with the needy,
Till their post-mortems make a tyro gasp;
And all our Saint Cecilias, grown greedy,
Gossip and gamble, grousing as they grasp:
Wherefore, unwooed of you, let fair or frights bridge
In every den from Berkeley Square to Knightsbridge.

Better an æon in the Waldorf's courts
Better with easy Elsies to philander,
Where curls are honest-bleached for trusting sports
And Phyllis plies the powder-puff with candour;
Than constant bickerings and sour retorts
Across the baize where tattle plays the pander.
Better to buy the Gaiety's caresses,
Than tap the source of doubling damsels' dresses.

Wipe out the score, and come ! Beneath her lindens
  Your Eve awaits you now the game is over.
Are not her limbs as lithe as Topsy Sinden's ?
  Dance thou the Mordkin unto her Pavlova !
There are your Quatre Bras, and there your Mindens;
  There shall no spy cry treason of your trover !
Come ! I had liefer see you the adorer
Of ten St. Ivals than a single Cora.

CANTO XIII

One summer Sabbath morn—blue day for such
As mope about the statue of Achilles,
Top-hatted and be-booted overmuch—
Red-letter morning for the little Willies
Who toot the motor-horn and slack their clutch
Before the gates of coryphantine fillies—
Observe our hero, Burberried *en gala*,
Brake, at the house of Eve, his new Itala.

His pride, is she; more dear he holds her throttle
Than any moulded throat of them that sing,
Smoother her sleek torpedo's varnished mottle
Than softest gloss of cheek's complexioning:
And woe to him who vesta dares, or dottle,
Against the sanctity of either wing.
Loving, he stays her spark; and entering straight,
Follows the capless maid who bids him wait.

Not once, since first the co-responding Dardan
Blasphemed the tiring of the Queen of Sparta,
Has woman begged a long-kept courtier's pardon.
Drinkless, unsummoned, tarrieth the martyr;
While cold the tappets grow; and stiff, the cardan:
And 'Oh!' thinks he, 'it will be hard to start her.'
For be the lady never so inspiring,
A novice dreads his cylinders' back-firing.

He peers at squirrel-wheel and love-birds' cages,
At awful pictures and appalling china;
Fretful, he turns the postcard album's pages;
Traces the cyphers of each photo's signer.
Ever, beneath the goad, his spirit rages
To watch the wasted daylight waxing finer.
Scarce has he time a yawning oath to smother,
Enters—not Eve, but Eve's amazing mother.

The self-same scarlet capped the poll maternal
As incandesced upon the filial crown;
Doffed every night, it flushed again, diurnal,
The ruddiest oriflamme in London Town.
Not one who wooed the daughter's favours vernal
'Scaped the autumnal chants of Ma's renown;
To each and all, this orison she sung:
'Do as I did and work while you are young!'

Yet *how* she'd moiled, in that Victorian youth
Long ere the days of telephones or cables,
Divulged she never—no—nor told forsooth
How she had gotten diamonds and sables.
Said some, she was indeed that 'Giddy Ruth'
Who danced on legendary supper-tables:
But no man knew by what commercial means
She had acquired such fortune in her teens.

'Good-morrow, John,' the sporty dame remarks,
'And how's yourself? My word, you do look sniffy!
Me coming with you? I don't think! the Park's
More in my line. Eve won't be half a jiffy.
Now you take care of her, my lad. No larks!
Don't you go getting fined, or come home squiffy.'
(E'en so a valet's artful patter runs,
Who holds at bay his master's threatening duns.)

At last she comes, her ruby nimbus shrouded
In pheasant-feather toque and chiffon veiling;
Clears, in that instant, visage *triste* and clouded—
Before the sun-rays of her smile's assailing.
Only he murmurs: 'Skindles will be crowded;'
Suggests that lunch at Marlow might be 'nailing.'
(Reader, mark well, and marvel at her power:
He laughs, who has been waiting near an hour!)

So to the car; and oh! with what attentions
He tucks her in, the kindly dash conniving;
How tactful, counters the misapprehensions
Fond motherhood displays about his driving.
His hand is on the switch; unreason mentions
Her fear they may be latish in arriving;
A crankless start the petrol-god provides,
And down Acacia Road the racer glides.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Far have they fared, Telemachus and Mentrix,
Since first she schooled him not to rush his fences;
And Venus, gyring orbital eccentrics,
Has transited the arc of his expenses.
He's passed Love's thousand kitten-plays and hen-
tricks,
Love's moods conditional, Love's future tenses,
Love's presents, Love's imperatives—to find
Love's perfect conjugation still declined.

In Tiffany's, in Cartier's despite,
The higher planes are hid from his erotics.
Unmoved by any bloom of Carlton White,
By Felton's or by Solomon's exotics,
Star-like, aloof, divine, remotely bright,
(Praise belladonna, mildest of narcotics!)
Her eyes just deign to scan emotion's birth:
Only to seek the void again, in mirth.

Jack, have a care; nor pile too high the debts
  Because one chorus-lady will not kiss you!
Have done with orchids, motor-landaulets,
  And jewelled trifles wrapped about in tissue!
That impish janitor George Edwardes sets
  To guard the passage whence his houris issue,
Knows you too well amidst the laddish laity
That throngs the Aldwych entrance of the Gaiety!

Friend Oddy bows too low before your coming!
  Too quick, the guardian of Boulter's Lock
Touches his cap to greet your launches humming
  Their challenged progress through the lunch-hour's
    block!
Too oft have I descried your broker thumbing
  The rustling parchments of discarded stock!
There are too many of your I.O.U.'s
In the locked coffers of the waiting Jews!

A lot you care for them this Sunday morning!
  Your fingers play upon each shining lever;
Your siren shrieks its triple-whistled warning,
  Flies from your path the barely-missed retriever.
Peril of fines and risked endorsements scorning,
  Faster and faster speed the wheels; while Eva
Nods her approval, sympathetic, radiant,
Each time on 'top' you top some easy gradient.

Through Uxbridge town your low two-seater sweeps;
A tramless tarmac now, the grey road pours.
Sudden, beneath your urging foot, she leaps;
The carburettor moans; the cut-out roars;
Round the marked dial the tell-tale needle creeps.
Over the hill to Beaconsfield she soars;
Streaks down the vale, a blur of flecked maroon,
Till Wycombe's chimneys bar the smokeless noon.

Leftwards she 'scends—alas, on lower gear.
A league below, the ribbon Thames unrolls
From Hurley Lock to Cookham's Kosher Weir,
That weir whose waves are packed with punting Poles.
A faint haze shimmers over marge and mere.
Your gate-change clicks through all its four controls;
On hushed 'direct,' her downward course she takes;
The pliant clutch supplants the rasping brakes.

Eve! it may be, no more ye ride together,
Arm touching arm that twirls the steering pillar.
Autumn impinges swift on summer weather,
As Surrey cedes her fame to Aston Villa.
Scorn not the Paphian's Cytherean tether!
Forget, forego the pose of false Priscilla!
Has he not waited long? To-day 'twere meeter
To reckon '*La Commedia è finita.*

Ho, landlord of the Angler ! stap your best !
  Snorts a fresh car to join your lengthy rota.
Grin welcome, and uncoat the honoured guest
  Who brings Miss Eve St. Ival—*haud ignota !*
Prepare to sacrifice the chicken's breast,
  Let lesser limbs be lesser lunchers' quota !
For them, though others starve, let waiters clear
The window-table by the tumbling weir !

Now mix with simples and with luscious herb,
  With strawberries, with soda and with cider,
A cup to quench their thirst ! Try not, to curb
  The Kodaks of the quidnuncs who have spied her !
For rarely doth publicity disturb
  A nibbling actress or her meal's provider ;
Rather he asks attention, who affords
The bounding beauties of the British boards.

They who have dawdled with some playful charmer,
  Their luncheon over, on the river's bank ;
Weary of Dunlop and of corded Palmer,
  Tired of the shifting gauge, the shafted crank ;
Stayed by the water's restful panorama,
  Lulled by the music of the rowlock's clank ;
They know, and they alone, the tranquil joy
That comes to you this afternoon, my boy.

Watch well the eyes of Eve! No longer haughty,
Earthwards at last the hard-won goddess bendeth.
Lips that so mocked, relax to 'rather naughty';
Ears that were deaf, to whispered hint she lendeth.
Often the top-speed of a racing 'forty'
To some such softening of a siren tendeth.
Bide you your time! mayhap, when Dian rises,
Some gladsome bay shall crown your enterprises.

Hark, 'twas the five-fold chime of Lipton's nectar!
See, her ringed fingers fidget with the tongs!—
Wait! The sun sinks—soon mother will expect her—
Yet still she lingers—still the tea prolongs.
Yon church-bells peal to summon choir and rector;
List, 'tis the organ-chant of evensongs!
Quick! Ere she's time to change the fractious front,
Settle her deftly in the cushioned punt!

Nay, not upstream! where never friendly rushes
Shall screen the preludes of your primal kisses.
Down! By the Quarry Woods, the river hushes;
Far from a lover's ken the loud launch hisses.
There, the gelt barbel and the missel-thrushes
Shall be the sole spectators of your blisses;
There, in your arms, reluctant, adjectival,
Take and possess you once of Eve St. Ival!

Twilight : breezes and wavelets sink to slumber . . .
Beneath green boughs, the fairies of the dusk
Are weaving veil on veil of gauzy umber ;
Perfumed, awaken mint and river-musk ;
Softly the weir-race croons its cradle number ;
Steals round the bend the *Delta's* twinkling busk . . .
Starlight above : below, star-shadows shielding
The transports of another Naiad's yielding.

' Darling, I've always loved you. . . . Won't you say,
Only this once, you care a bit for me ? '
' Don't, Jack . . . please, *please* don't ask me that
to-day,
To-day of all days. . . . If I had been free,
I might have loved you.' ' Eve, don't turn away . . .
Sweetheart, *do* give me just one kiss . . . ah, be
A little kinder ! '—Stop this chatter, Jack!
'Tis not the hour for parley, but attack !

Do I consume the filamented candle
That you should falter with the end in sight ?
Have not these cantos taught you how to handle
The moods of knowing and of neophyte ?
Prowess, not pretty words we use, who dandle
The coy resisters of a summer's night.
Think of the many times you've been a suitor,
And do not bring disgrace upon your tutor !

That's better! slide one arm beneath her waist!
Set your right hand, compelling, on her shoulder!
Doth she protest?—a little only. Haste!
Let not the flush of your embrace grow colder!
Now, in one raptured struggle interlaced,
Body to body, breast to breast enfold her;
Till eye with eye and lip with lip afire
Kindle the answering fever of desire!

Enough, enough of stolen boon and granted!
Cry truce to hot-lipped kiss on hair and throat
To eager hands that clung, to heart that panted,
To mouth that begged for passion's antidote!
Up! and out-root the steel-shod pole you planted,
Unbind the chain that holds the rocking boat,
And fare you forth, in fear of mist and midge,
To where the Angler gleams below the bridge!

Not all your days, come widowette, come wedlock,
Shall memory of this evening wholly leave you:
You shall not quite forget one loosened red lock,
So long as female subtleties deceive you.
And when grim Charon poles you to his Deadlock
Where the Past's wailing wraiths rise up to grieve you,
Rhadamanth's self shall pass no single stricture
Upon the recollection of this picture.

And when, yourself a ghost, you stroll distraught
  Along the towing-path of asphodel,
You shall see mirrored in your ghostly thought
  A phantom punt that rides the phantom swell,
Prone in her bow a shadow-figure, fraught
  With charms once yours—alas, intangible.
Then shall your homing soul beat pinioned wings,
In hopeless yearning for lost earthly things.

Then shall you spot sprite-landlords, silhouetted
  In spirit-doorways, waving you good-bye;
Hear a dream-village echo to the fretted
  Throb of your cut-out; make the ghost-car fly
Down Lethe's chestnut avenues vignetted
  In beams of mouldered Rushmore's brilliancy;
And in the tartarean darkness feel
Eve's hand touch your hand on the steering-wheel.

Thus shall you motor with your spectre-mate
  By hairpin turnings of Cocytus Road;
Till cobra-coiffed the jealous Furies wait—
  As waits to-night in daughterless abode
That mother-Fury's horrid-scowling pate,
  Reft of pink wig and massive molar's load . . .
Even in Acheron, that memoried glimpse
Shall hurl you howling to the nether imps!

* * * *

Reader, what of the sequel? Cuter scribes,
With sharper quills than my old-fashioned Muse's,—
Mongermen of the Carmelitish tribes,
The Star's reporters and the Evening News's—
Served up that theme for thoughtless cockneys' jibes,
Hot as the fragrance of Old Ireland's stews is.
So fierce that day were journalistic volleys,
Men fired no gratis puffs to boom The Follies.

These were the lurid words the posters carried,
Through the black hours of Monday afternoon:
'Gaiety's Loss.' 'Another Actress Married.'
'Green-room Romance.' 'The Secret Honeymoon.'
Each Bond Street lounger paused, each tea-girl tarried,
To read who was the lady, who the loon.
Dulcineas at the Carlton and the Ritz
Gasped: 'Can it be *my* Quixote? Is it Fitz?'

All upper-case, the leaded headlines ran :
'Miss Eve St. Ival at the altar-rail.'
'Stage-favourite, last of famous Scottish clan,
The Lairds Mac Ivalcon of Maida Vale,
Wedded at Westminster to wealthy man.'
Below, the twelve-point pica shrieked its tale :
'We learn the honeymoon is to be spent
In the groom's motor on the Continent.'

It was indeed a triumph of reportship :
They gave the artiste's *rôles*, her lap-dog's photo;
Age, birthplace, hobbies, candidates in courtship . . .
One name alone was hid from their Onoto—
The bridegroom's ! If he banked, or broked, or fought ship,
Were airman, yeoman, Crown Prince of Sokoto—
That was the missing link in yellow history,
A blank, unplumbed, unfathomable mystery.

Some impious incognito had whisked
Its leading lady from the English stage ;
Some Vanderbilt of Vanderbilts had risked
Her agent's claims, her impressario's rage ;
But who ? What infant Icarus had frisked
Beyond the range of Fleet Street's inkiest sage ?
Canards there were, vague guesses, intuitions :
But no firm fact writ clear in those editions.

A thousand theories petrified the West:
Some deemed Gillett's the blade; to some, 'twas plain
A Rosslyn's handiwork stood there confessed;
These accused Kitchener; those, Teddy Payne.
The Bachelor's Club was 'blowed'; the Bath was 'blessed';
Aghast Athenians beat their brains in vain;
The marble palace of the R.A.C.
Buzzed its loud members' curiosity.

Ask not of me to tell you! 'tis too sad
The final tragedy of this my verse:
Nameless let him remain, that ruined lad
Who took red Eve for better or for worse;
Who bowed in shame the white hairs of his dad,
And earned his broken mother's dying curse! . . .

Yet know, the victim of that Marriage-Monday
Was *not* the madcap motorist of Sunday!

CANTO XIV

To them whose lives are gyved by no constraint
  Saving the Meal, the Shave, the Manicure—
Who, hearing duty's clarion sounding faint,
  Have turned away to follow pleasure's lure—
A sure day dawns, when *ennui's* carking taint
  Maketh each hour an æon to endure :
Too decadent to sin, too bored to bound,
These, as the cab-horse, ply their sluggish round.

Ever they loaf, of Bond Street's best observed,
  Whither the grill-room or the bridge-club becks ;
Tired eyes that stare, 'neath bowlers deeply curved ;
  Oiled, empty crania on craning necks.
Of languor sapped, of indolence unnerved,
  Late-risen emblems of a neuter sex,
Aimless, monocled, mooching willy-nilly,
They crawl down Dover Street to Piccadilly.

Alas, to think of my Sir Galahad
Among their ranks ! to see those cheeks grown whiter,
That bright glance as a dog's glance stricken sad,
Those wrists gone thin, those trousers tailored tighter !
Alas my ' Don Juan ', a ' Dunciad ' !
Wilt thou not aid him, Lady Aphrodita ?
By thy command, the Camp, the Court, were shut ;
And naught but this is left—to be a ' nut.'

Is he to be as they for whom no twinges
Of wakening conscience stir the deadened brain ?
In him, still leaps the flame of hope and tinges
His darkling soul ; and still some little pain
For the fine things he might have done, impinges
Upon the thing he does. Is it then vain ?
Have they who judged him falsely at the start,
Made him for aye a man from men apart ?

Regard the comrades of his Eton days,
The ' minors ' of the ' majors ' that he knew—
This one, a cheery sportsman of the Bays :
That one, a pillar of the Oxford crew.
Hear me, O Mother ! gracious are thy ways ;
To each thou gav'st his meed of manhood's due—
The Bar, the Mart, the Hustings, or the Mess ;
While Jack has no career but Idleness !

For him, remains the week-end at Dieppe—
Le Cinq, he stands on, plundered of the Seven;
Friendship of wastrel and of demirep;
Infrequent visits to his native Devon;
Exiguous whisky in colossal Schweppe;
The fuddled couch, the breakfasts at eleven;
The gloom of settling-days that find him stony;
The gleam when Gant or Duggie yields a 'pony.'

Thou, who hast outlawed him to this abyss
Where Effort enters not, nor brave Ambition—
But, pale as shadows from the realms of Dis,
Slack youth awaits the afternoon edition,
Weighing the nutshell form of that or this
To the slow curl of cigarette's ignition—
Thou, for whose sake he dared one decent thing,
Grant me thy succour for his rescuing!

❧ ❧ ❧ ❧

The spring was come, and down the Ladies' mile
Rode the linked squadrons of the heavy liver;
Bloomed in the West the daffodils of style,
At dance and court fresh *débutantes* did quiver:
But Jack was scourged of retrospection's bile;
Daylong his drinks had swollen like a river,
As, shade on shade, the past's envisaged ghosts
Had gibbered to him at the Azure Posts.

Borne on the partridge-wings of Johnnie Walker,
  Had Amy's guilty spook bemoaned its shame;
Had German Elsa smiled, and, leagued to balk her,
  The Vermonts—Susie, Marion, and Mame;
Anew he'd 'scaped the county's deadliest stalker,
  Leaving that Alice who was his to claim;
Anew he'd played for threepennies with Cora,
Supped a Triquette, and been red Eve's adorer.

But ever o'er the flimsy wraiths had towered
  The massive bogey of his instant state:
For debt and dun from every lattice lowered;
  So that, or Carey Street must be his fate,
Or he must wed some maiden amply dowered,
  Or beard 'the governor' in hot debate . . .
Ere midnight chimed he fled that haunted pub,
To seek distraction at the Supper Club.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Grafton, where once *La Tonkinoise* resounded
  And a bold boy might earn the pearly gage!
Grafton, where *maris complaisants* abounded,
  How art thou changed from that ecstatic age
When first our sacred coterie was founded!
  To-night, the draggled fringes of the stage
Profane thy boards—whence erst our law, censorious,
Banned not the quick, but blackballed the notorious.

Jack stood half-dazed within the doorway's shelter,
  Eyed of the sofaed pairs beneath the fern.
Or in a cadenced pause, or helter-skelter,
  He watched the close-held couples shift and turn ;
Making no move to join the dance's welter.
  To more than one, 'twas easy to discern
He deemed the two-step's mazes over-risky
For limbs that shook with triple-planet whisky.

His ears were stunned with stamp and swish and
    blither ;
  Over his eyes it seemed a veil was cast,
Across whose woof blurred shapes and vague did
    slither—
  Matron and maid, respectable and fast.
When lo ! now hither swaying, and now thither,
  Drove other vision of the vanished past . . .
Where had he seen that form before, and where
The raven shimmer of that lustrous hair ?

In what forgotten pleasure-time, long dead,
  Had that frilled comet cleaved its radiant swath
Athwart the lesser stars ? Whence memoried,
  That pang of separation's aftermath ?
Had he not known and loved that dainty head
  Or e'er his feet had trod their downward path
Of present guilt ? Or was it but a trick
Of maddened sense, that cut him to the quick ?

Did he but dream ? Or died away the din
  Of rag-time's ramping thud, till, strangely clear,
The mystic wedding-bells of *Lohengrin*
  Stole benisons upon his magicked ear ?
No dream ! the last haze sundered, letting in
  The beam of recollection. Sudden, shere
Across the murk of storm-scud's wrack and rift,
Outshone the countenance . . . of Prudence Swift !

'Twas she ! his unkissed queen of opera-night,
  The first-desired of joyous long-agos !
'Twas she indeed ! Arrayed in filmy white,
  She floated by—each step a new repose;
Haloed of love-rays, satin-skinned and slight,
  Unjewelled, but at her brow one scarlet rose.
His marvelling glance commanded, hers obeyed,
Till Recognition leaped—and lit—and stayed.

Straight at that look his inmost being swore,
  This time at least, Hag Fate should not defeat him.
This was the hand of destiny ! no more
  Should scruple hold, nor ill-timed shyness cheat
    him !
The music ceased. Burred accent, as of yore,
  Explained how *vurry* pleased she was to meet him,
And how she would be glad if he were able
To join the party at her supper-table.

Now neither gods above nor men on earth
  May mix, unmoved, the barley and the grape;
And none may gaze on eyes alight with mirth
  Nor rippled contour's scarce-concealèd shape—
But in him Fancy's Phœnix, taking birth
  From old flames' ashes, flutters to escape:
So Jack, forgotten debts, discarded troubles,
Kisses Pandora in the breaking bubbles.

I see him, Prudence preening at his side,
  With every instant gay, and gayer, growing;
Lamps gleam and glasses touch; deft waiters glide;
  Jest follows jest where Clicquot's best is flowing.
Yet each and all of them whose laughter vied
  With his and hers, have passed from out my knowing;
Save that I spy, across that festive board,
The hatchet profile of her Draper Lord.

For who that hands the purse-strings to a wife,
  Can e'er forget the face of Silas Swift?—
Silas, black stirrer of domestic strife,
  Cold key to turn the female barque adrift—
Silas whose visage, lithoed to the life,
  Beckons from hoarding, omnibus and lift—
Whose telephone's unnumbered coils outrun
The wires of Gerrard and of Western One.

How can I limn my hero, crazy-keen,
Drinking the burr of Prue's responsive prattle;
The glamour of her corsage and the sheen
Of shoulder's curve; the chink of gilded chattel;
When rises ever that fell brow between,
Creased with deep scheming for the coming battle,
Weighing the wording of his 'Opening Sale'
For Telegraph and Chronicle and Mail?

I watch them dancing, dancing—and I guess
Their elfin spirits summoning each to each;
Lips that deny the heart its yearned-for yes;
Pulses that give the lie to frigid speech;
Forbidden fruit of southern comeliness,
Dangling delicious out of boyhood's reach . . .
Confound the power which draws my tempted pen
To that Napoleon of Dry-goods Men!

I only wonder if her husband cares;
Whether he knows, and mindeth not at all,
The secret of the alcove on the stairs,
The meaning of the hand-clasp in the hall.
Inscrutable are multi-millionaires!
Perchance his jealousy is rankling gall
To see his lady dallying with Jack—
Perchance he plots a cut in huckaback.

Would that I knew ! but all is faint and hidden,
A lost stone of my story's diadem.
I hear the sleepy chauffeur homeward-bidden ;
I catch the flirt of Prue's uplifted hem ;
The Rolls-Royce gathers speed . . . falls back, outridden,
My Pegasus. We may not fare with them,
Adown the road of motorists accursed,
Unto the Willett-haunts of Chislehurst.

Yet, Microbe-Muse, before thou sink'st to rest
In the embrace of thy Germ-Sisters Nine,
Thank the bland goddess of the argent breast,
Philommedis, Phallommeda divine,
Who granted this her worshipper's request ;
And stooped in kindly clouds incarnadine,
Vouchsafing of her grace a further ray
To light her page along his outlawed way !

CANTO XV

GREAT is the power of Venus! She estranges
The wedded pair, or mates illegal turtles :
Her cestus parts—and lo ! Youth's outlook changes,
His mourning cypresses become her myrtles ;
Hotfoot adown the flowered ways he ranges,
Drawn to the flash of disappearing kirtles.
Parents may grieve and lonesome wives complain,
The hunter feels the hunting-thrill again.

Great are the Deities of Advertising !
They wave their wands—and palaces are builded :
At every shibboleth of their devising,
Some dross of earth to earth's desire is gilded ;
Caught by the magic of their merchandising,
Mabel in quest of blouses, does as Lil did.
Let alien hands her cradled offspring rock,
Woman *must* have ' that ducky little frock.'

So Jack forsook the bored path and the dreary;
Forgot the bill renewed, the I.O.U.,
The tailor's tantrum and the banker's query;
To track the footprints of elusive Prue.
Redeemed from knightly money-lenders, weary
Of forced garage, the old Itala flew,
On gorgeous mornings when the summer sun shone,
Down the Kent Road to Chislehurst and luncheon.

But in the heart of London's shopping-centre
The master-mason and the plasterer toiled:
With bronze, with marble facia's magenta,
And four-squared granite where the scroll-work coiled,
They wrought a pleasure-house that all might enter,
Nor e'en the lightest appro-whim be foiled:
While Silas planned, cigar between his lips,
The launch of ninety-year debentureships.

They wandered where his lilies wooed his phloxes,
Or whirled away to Winchelsea and Rye;
Keith Prowse gave them the shelter of his boxes;
Dieudonné screened them from the curious eye:
Till the first breeze of passion's equinoxes
Scattered the peaceful clouds in friendship's sky,
Till every word and every look grew fraught
With scarce-veiled meaning of their kindred thought.

And the short season waned. Almost concluded
  Uprose the Parthenon of Regent Street;
Express by day and Star by night alluded
  To the great hour when work should be complete:
Till the cold sweat that Marshall's brow exuded,
  To Snelgrove's spread; till Fear, on furtive feet,
Sent Rumour of the Transatlantic reiver
To chill the veins of Robinson and Cleaver.

But one by one the barriers were falling,
  And she was 'Prissy dear' and he was 'Boy':
There were mad moments, blood to young blood
    calling;
  Partings in anger, reconciled in joy:
Came times, beyond a wary wife's forestalling,
  When fingers touched and twined in tender ploy:
For Opportunity with daily potions
Roused the ebullience in their emotions.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Gone, were the days of the augustal grouse;
  And with the advent of the browner bird,
The hammer ceased its tap in Silas House.
  No line, no puffing paragraph referred
To those masked pageants. Quiet as cats that mouse
  The magnate's minions waited for the word . . .
Deceptive calm! 'Twas holocaust that burst,
Upon the morning of October's first!

Howl, Harrod, howl! Let Gordon Selfridge wail!
Mingle your tears with Woolland's, William Whiteley!
Lord Mayors, nor Concert-teas, nor Great White Sale,
Nor shopmen serving never so politely,
Nor any Bargain Basement, shall avail
To raise the takings you weep over nightly;
Since London waked to read that black decree,
"Our Opening Week—All Wares Eleven-three."

Panting, they tore from Wandsworth's leafy glades,
From Streatham's hill where chapel nigh to church is,
From Walton's pines and Ilford's soapy shades,
From Sundridge Park embowered of silver birches:
Married and mateless—mothers—spinster maids,
Letting lone parrots languish on their perches—
By tram and tube and train and taxi-cab
The women of a nation came to grab.

They flung themselves on selvedges and smocking,
On stoles of skunk and wraps of wolverine,
They howled like fiends o'er handkerchief and stocking,
They bit, they scratched, they screamed for *crêpe-de-chine.*
Duchess with Mrs. Snookson interlocking,
Slattern with silk-clad, massaged with unclean,
Rabid Bacchantes of the shopping lust
Wrastled and stamped and scrimmaged in the dust.

Daylong the green-clothed Keepers of the Gate
Fought for their lives against the frenzied crowd :
Riddled with hatpins, ringed with eyes of hate,
Torn by the fang of frump, the tush of dowd,
They held their posts until the stroke of eight
Gave such brief respite as the law allowed,
And spent improvers blessed the saviour clock,
Prone 'midst the remnants of their mangled stock.

Their fight was won, *their* day of battle ended ;
Truce brooded over desk and peristyle :
But lonely in his sanctum, sombre, splendid,
The tireless general paced the velvet pile.
Now this, now that, the master-brain perpended ;
Here a new ad. of supermunyon guile,
There a big policy of slaughtered prices . . .
And left his Prudence to her own devices.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

She was alone. There was not one to cheer her ;
Muffin and crumpet chilled, and China tea.
Dear to her friends was Prudence Swift, but dearer—
Her husband's words, ' All Wares Eleven-three.'
Bickley was gone, and Bromley came not near her ;
Sidcup was womanless ; deserted, Lea ;
And Chislehurst ?—God wot, *she* never paid
Her carriaged calls upon the *retail* trade !

It was the tea-gown's hour; the firelight gleamed
On slippered feet and wave of sable tresses:
Too wild, too beauteous a bird she seemed
For clumsy Silas's bejewelled jesses.
'What were cold necklaces to her, who dreamed
The fiery torque of intimate caresses?
The pillowed ease of luxury and fashion—
To her, who craved the restless lash of passion?'

'Silas? His sixty years were evil-dated
To be the playmates of her twenty-five!
Must she then spend her girlhood's prime unmated?
Be as one dead, who was so mad alive?
The day, the hour, the instant's self was fated!
Why count the cost?' Already, down the drive,
She heard the mounting wheels that bore to her—
If she but willed it—the deliverer.

No need to let suspicious flunkeys fling
The formal portal to her only guest,
No need to wait the far-heard, muffled ring.
Or e'er his cylinders had throbbed to rest,
Herself in fluttered pink came hastening;
And all the joy her loneliness confessed,
Burred in the welcome at her lips' command,
Pulsed in the pressure of her either hand.

Silent, she drew him o'er the oaken boards
  Decked with silk tapestry of Persia's loom,
Unto a doorway where two hauberked lords
  Of jousting-days kept guard upon her room.
Darkly her Morlands and her William Wards
  Stared from their Adams panels in the gloom;
For mutual knowledge, tuned to equal pitch,
Disdained the bright inhospitable switch.

Half-guessed, half-glimpsed, against the greying
      pane—
  As worshippers descry an angel-face
In some stained window of their childhood's fane—
  He knew her profile; knew each darling trace
Of lash and brow and cheek, and orbs whose rain
  Warred ever with her laughter; slender grace
He longed to clasp, yet dared not; dimpled charm
Of satin shoulder and of warm, white arm.

As he of her, she knew each trait of him;
  The steel-blue eyes, the head she longed to stroke,
The nervous hands, the poise of muscled limb,
  The sharp man-scent of Harris-tweed and smoke.
And who shall say 'twas only woman's whim?
  Had he but stirred a finger to invoke
Love's wingèd boy, small doubt the boy had
      pounced . . .
He made no move: and dinner was announced.

Fool! never *peep'ng* Tom secured Godiva!
Fool! who kenned never, whither Fancy listed!
'Twas twilight's hour, emotion's surest shriver;
He gazed, he yearned, he murmured—and desisted:
Till Dives summoned oysters of Miss Driver,
And *paille-de-menthe* deliriously twisted,
To set the very soul in Prue aware
Of what it meant to leave a millionaire.

Conscience, religion, loyalty, nor fear
Of nisi's doom, had moved as moneyed meal did.
Damask, and Venice glass-ware crystal-clear,
Orchids, and Sheffield dishes silver-shielded,
The twelve Apostle-spoons she held so dear,
These she saw lost forever if she yielded;
Lost—with her solemn servants, reared in houses
Where faithless as the husband is, the spouse is.

'Did they suspect already? Could she ever
Endure a deference that cloaked derision,
The petty subterfuge, the vain endeavour
To keep things hidden from the pantry's vision?
Yet dared she take the bolder step and sever,
In one swift flash of feminine decision,
The knots that bound her?' . . . Georgian, was the tray
Wherefrom the butler served the *Marnier*.

Dinner was done; once more they were alone:
And now she sensed herself upon the verge
Of vasty gulfs; below her, the unknown.
His look was lambent flame. She saw the surge
Of blood-beat on his brow With glance and tone
He lashed her cowardice, as with a scourge:
'We can't go on like this—it isn't right.
Chuck the whole show, and come with me—
to-night!'

'Prissy, it's serious. God knows, I've tried
To play the game—but, darling, I adore you.
We can't be merely friends. You *must* decide.
Your husband doesn't care a button for you—
You know it's true—that evening when you cried,
You told me so. Prue sweetheart, I implore you,
Let me take care of you for always—fill
Your life with love. My dearest, say you will.'

Then, as she strove to sift the twin replies
That fought for utterance on her faltering tongue,
Bending he knelt to her, in suppliant guise,
And seized her hand and kissed it and outflung
One arm about her knees, and would not rise;
But ever to cool palm his hot lips clung:
Nor, kneeling, knew if fortune frowned or favoured—
For in that moment Prudence almost wavered.

An instant, flashed on her the wondrous thought:
'Here, was Romance—well worth the sacrifice
Of every puny bauble money-bought;
Here, was the one true jewel beyond all price.'
An instant, brushed her finger-tips athwart
The lowered head of him. But in a trice
Chill reason conquered; hand and heart withdrew.
'I won't! I *won't!* not even, Jack, for you.'

'You are so young—you'll never understand
What it would mean to me to lose all this.
There are some women who might think it grand
To throw away a million for a kiss—
But I'm not built that way. No, leave my hand—
Don't make things harder for me! I shall miss
You so much, Jack dear—you've been sweet to me.
But I *can't* do it, boy—it just *can't* be.

'Don't think too badly of me . . . I *have* cared . . .
Cared more, perhaps, than you will ever guess . . .
One day, you will be glad I haven't dared
This thing you ask . . . Ah, don't! . . . just once
then, yes,
I'll kiss you. . . . There . . . Now go!'
And so he fared,
Recking not whither in his dumb distress,
Out of her life. And Prudence caught the throbs
Of him departing, choking back her sobs.

CANTO XVI

Warm wet wind from the South ; the engine's roar ;
  Mist and sorrow and sighs and broken pledges . . .
Had you a soul that night, stout car who bore
  Your crazy master past the dark yew-hedges ?
Were they alive, your sensate tyres that shore
  Their flattened trail along the grassy edges,
That veered and checked and swerved their headlong
      travel,
And forced the square-treads bite the shifting gravel?

His gloveless hands were numbed upon your wheel ;
  His feet were impotent upon your brake ;
And you it was, incarnate thing of steel,
  Whose conscious bonnet guessed the road to take.
To him, 'twas all a dream-drive, hardly real—
  Bromley, its windows here and there awake—
The lamp-lights curling Catfordwards—the trees—
The villas swirling past him—and the breeze.

As of herself, your sentient siren sang
  Her tocsin to the vivid, vanished faces.
Loud in *his* ears, above the trolley's clang,
  Above the clamour of the market-places,
Ever the ukase of dismissal rang;
  Always he saw his empress with the traces
Of coming tears in down-dropt eyes, blue-lidded—
And never once your faithful Dunlops skidded.

Your guardian chassis shunned the Vanguard's frisk:
  Loyal and true, you held the slippery track;
Skated the dread curve of the Obelisk;
  Hurtled up New Cross hill; and brought him back
To where Big Ben's illuminated disc
  Shone fourfold welcomeness against the black;
Found him his flat; and rested from your labours,
Amidst the gossip of your garage-neighbours.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Scarce the fire smouldered in the dying ashes;
  Flapped in the gale each melancholy blind;
Eerily clicked the loosened window-sashes.
  Fit home-coming indeed! but worse to find,
The notes of those to whom their owing cash is
  More than fond hearts or mistresses unkind:
High-piled upon the table-cloth they lay,
Fell first-fruits of September's quarter-day.

Vendors of smokes and jewellery and raiment,
Each craved his draft of income's dwindled fount.
Here Cartier failed to grasp what his delay meant,
There Scholte rendered once again the count;
Tremlett and Lobb besought a partial payment,
While Sandorides pressed their full amount.
Statement on statement, ravening for remittance;
Form-letters by the score—but ne'er a quittance!

Curse on the tradesmen! Let them wait and hope!
It would be weeks, before *they* dared to sue . . .
Not so the one who launched *that* envelope,
That waspish rearguard of the overdue:
'Twas bitter hard, on such a night to cope
With the worn patience of the patient Jew,
'Trusting he had advised the Messrs. Cox
To meet his bill upon the seventh prox.'

'This was the final lap. His game was up.
There were none left to love; and none, to lend.
To the last dregs he'd drained his Fortune's cup.
Naught but disgrace remained. It was the end.'
Frightened he felt, and beat; a cowered pup,
Without a prospect and without a friend;
Powerless to make atonement for his sinning,
A paupered oaf, foredoomed from the beginning.

'Right from the start he'd never had a chance,
Thanks to the blindness of a stupid system.
His very birth had served but to enhance
His uselessness. Since Eton had dismissed him,
What had been left of life—except to dance
Homage on girls who pitied as they kissed him?
By Hudson, Thames, by Maine and Seine and Otter
Had he not always been a ghastly rotter?

'What was the point of going on with it?
He knew a way—far better take it now . . .
Only one way! It wouldn't hurt a bit.
The walls were thick, they'd never hear the row—
And if they did . . . He'd simply *got* to quit;
The Why was certain—certain as the How,
There in his burry, blued from breech to muzzle . . .
The only sure solution of his puzzle.

'Heavens, how easy—what a fine get-out!
Hair-trigger cocked, and barrel 'twixt his teeth—
Clenched on the foresight lest it slipped about.
Shut eyes above, a finger curved beneath,
One squeeze—and then, a stop to debt and doubt . . .'
Now Muse, that hatest cerecloth, bier and wreath,
Fly quickly hither with thy metred magic
To save him from a death so setly tragic.

And thou, weird Goddess of Coincidence,
  Reft of whose aid the epic and the novel
Must pass away! Who, of thine excellence,
  Canst raise a hapless hero from a hovel
To thrones' and palaces' magnificence!
  Thou, at whose altars prostrate playwrights grovel,
Answer! and send thy suppliant invoker
One cable cased of governmental ochre!

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

Long time he knelt upon the cushioned fender,
  Gazing his last upon the pictured loves;
Triquette's pert face; and Eve, flirtatious, slender—
  She's signed it: 'Just to thank you for the gloves'—
The Vermonts, arms-entwining, triply tender;
  And Cora, calculating her 'aboves';
Lost Prudence, silver-framed for his desire . . .
There, at her feet, he found the mystic wire!

Now even they that practise hari-kari
  (Thus hara-kiri in our English ink)
Would stay the stomach-slitting knife and tarry
  To learn the smudged words pencilled on the pink.
'What might it mean? Would Prue divorce and
    marry?
  Or had some backed 'outsider' roped the 'chink'?'
Trembling, he tore; and ere the folds uncreased,
Read his the wealth of Ermyntrude—deceased.

Benignant ruler of the puppet-play,
  Thine be my thanks for this astounding luck!
The canto closes: wouldst thou have me say
  If Jack had flinched or soothly had the pluck
To dare the madly-contemplated way
  And rise, in one great moment, from the ruck?
Truth is, that public whom we bards deride,
Yet pander to, is tired of suicide.

CANTO XVII

Six months and more from that unhallowed eve
When, bowing to the edict of taboo,
I slew Jack's aunt to compass his reprieve,
He paced the platform-length of Waterloo.
There was a mourning band upon his sleeve,
But in his pocket tinkled many a sou;
Ergo et propter hoc he praised his gods
For her who lay so safe beneath the sods.

Reader, blame not the pitying Valkyrie
Who checked his finger on the Webley's trigger
With news of that most opportune expiry!
Perpend the spared loins of the graveyard digger,
Regard the coroner's unheld inquiry,
And at Coincidence forbear to snigger!
'Twas thanks to her the creditors of Jack
Were paid full tale, and still he had no lack

More—he had sworn unto himself an oath
That ne'er again should tradesman of the West
Gloat on *his* rendered statement's beanstalk growth,
Nor Credit rear her hydra-headed crest
O'er branching income, nor the giant sloth
Of partial payments mow 'midst that bequest.
Now, if he speculated peradventure,
It was but in some four-per-cent. debenture.

He had renounced the Supper Club, the Chorus,
The Monday Midget, Auction Bridge, and Oddy's,
And all that makes the pouch of youth grow porous :
He had plucked out the tallows and the toddies
Which ruined us and them who frisked before us :
So that a thousand county busybodies,
Sipping their tea or walking with the guns,
Voted him Bayard of the elder sons.

For such the fervour of his reformation
That only as the circled seasons brought
Some urgent need of tailor's ministration
Or bootmaker's, of tackle for his sport,
He visited the town of dead temptation.
And even then, no single wayward thought
Tempted the compass of his soul to veer
Towards fool gambolling of yesteryear.

None might have guessed, from his unruffled manner,
That he had missed the early morn express.
Calmly he sauntered, till the guard's green banner
Signalled departure; then, his porter's stress
Rewarded with the customary tanner,
He stepped aboard with studied hastelessness.
Slow as conveyance of a feed attorney,
The long train jolted on its westward journey.

He was alone. The reek of his cigar
Curled in blue incense upwards. Silken-hosed,
His feet reclined along the cushioned car.
Midway 'twixt sleep and wakefulness he dozed;
Till thought was loosed, and memory wandered far
Into that past where evermore he posed
As one who with the Fates had held high revel—
A cynic shape, half Don Juan, half devil.

Each with its bursted bond or conquered call,
'Neath lazy lids he watched the landmarks slide.
'Sandown—the ring that held him erst in thrall
Must find fresh plungers at the paddockside.
Brooklands—no more he'd feel the banking fall
And tilt beneath him as he took it wide
And dropped into the straight at sixty. Woking—
There slept the lady of the timely croaking.

'How he had lived! The women he had known!
The lips he'd kissed! The passions he'd inspired!
Red poppies in the wild oats he had sown,
How they had flaunted once, how they had fired
Their little hour; and then, how swiftly blown!
Well, he was wiser now—yes, wise and tired.
Love, at its best, was just a silly game:
Varied, the players; but the strokes, the same.

'Manicured paws, blacked lashes, powdered cheek,
Torturing shoe 'neath hobbled garment's hem,
Feigned looks, feigned locks, feigned pleasure and
feigned pique,
He knew them all too well—the paltry gem
That buys affection for a paltry week,
The sighs, the suppers—and was done with them.
What had they yielded him, save discontent? . . .
And Alice? Ah, but she was different!

'Alice—how straight she sat the leaping cob!
How sure she was when, skirted for the fray,
She backed his net-strokes with the deadly lob!
How sweet her wind-blown tresses' disarray
What time they beagled where the sea-caves sob
Beneath the flower-fringe over Ladram Bay!
But best the evening vision of her, gowned
In pale brocades her paler shoulders crowned!

'*She* was no London light-of-love who heckles
Till the dear stalls are changed for dearer box:
She was not always thinking of the shekels,
Or criticising other women's frocks:
She did not deem the sunshine fraught with freckles;
She did not deal in parrot-paradox:
Not over smart—but then who wanted smartness?
Not intellectual—who cared for tartness?

'Alice! the train was taking him to her,
To his pet playmate, idolised of old;
Into the West-land; herwards.' Andover—
Salisbury—Yeovil—Sidmouth. Fold on fold,
Their home-hills opened. Soon, against the blurr
Of dappled skyline, turrets tinged with gold,
He saw the Grange Towers rising. Budleigh station!
Porter and gaitered coachman grinned ovation.

'Good-evening, Master Jack, you sure be late.'
The whiplash flicked, the dogcart homeward sped.
The keeper's eldest capped him at the gate.
His unshot rooklets nested overhead. . . .
'It would be his, one day, this ringed estate. . . .
And she should share it.' Conscious of his tread,
The kennelled clumbers woke in whimpered joy:
Kee-ow, the pensive peacocks cried, Kee-oy.

That night, the polished soup-tureen reflected,
Around his father's hospitable table,
The belles of Budleigh's countryside collected—
Gertrude and Constance, Geraldine and Mabel:
But, of the one so eagerly expected,
No dulcet lisp meandered through the babel;
And he might only lift a secret chalice
Unto the souvenir of absent Alice.

Hour-long it stretched, that mammoth meal of Mammon—
From Canteloupe and purée vermicelli,
By mayonnaises of the Severn salmon,
Through aspicked entrée, sorbet, joint and jelly,
Past trifle and past savouries of gammon,
To strawberries and bloom of moscatelli.
At length the beckoned ladies rose; and, brought
In soft-foot reverence, appeared the port.

But e'en the circling of the cut decanter—
The ruby glow of Cockburn—roused him not,
To add his dicta to the bachelors' banter.
'What if there was another claimant hot
Upon the heiress of the cocoa-planter,
And failure once again must be his lot?
What if new love, as old loves, should disparage?
As Prudence mocked desire; so Alice, marriage?'

Right through the thick of the post-prandial Bridge
His mind went out beyond the doubled spade
To those enshrining towers behind the ridge,
Where even then, perchance, some county blade
Above the piano bent in sacrilege,
Turning Tschaikowsky for his darling maid.
There was amazement in his partners' faces
To see his led queens presaging held aces.

The Colonel crimsoned, and the Vicar muttered;
Thankful, were they, when midnight sounded 'Cease.'
Came coats, came wraps; fit gratitude was stuttered;
The last wheel rolled. Then, revelling in release
Jack sought his bed. The draught-tossed candle guttered,
And vanished. Slumber poured its healing peace
Upon the eyelids of my hero-boy.
Kee-ow, the drowsy peacocks cried, Kee-oy.

It is the instant of the evening rise.
The sun-rim slips behind the corn-clad hill
Adown the vale a homing heron flies;
Delicious breezes crinkle mead and rill.
Now from his sedgy lairs, wherein he lies
Daylong content to flap the scarlet gill,
The Monarch of the Pool swims sauntering out,
Sovereign-contemptuous of the lesser trout.

Monarch, heed well the greenheart's fatal flicker!
Let eyes be keen to know the man-made dun
That falls so softly where the real flies bicker
Below the arching bridge of Otterton!
Else shall the cruel creel of Hardy's wicker
Enfold your corpse before the set of sun;
Else shall the nether water's overlord
Feel the constraining yoke of Rowland Ward.

❦ ❦ ❦ ❦

In the marsh-pasture of the Devon kine—
So milking-proud that none dare doom them veal—
Low-crouched, Jack spies the tell-tale bubbles shine.
The rod-point sways; metallic, clicks the reel;
Hums through its rings the deftly lengthened line;
Far-flung and true, outcurves the feathered steel.
Now—if there's power in hackle, cord or oil—
Mark, and be swift to strike the speckled spoil!

Barely a foot above that greedy throat !
  Another second, and those jaws shall shut !
Watch where the trailing feathers cock and float,
  Watch for the shimmer of the straightened gut !—
A swirl ! a leap ! a flash of silver coat !
  The greenheart quivers to its agate butt . . .
Struck, and well struck ! The barbed death has him
    fast :
Let but the playing justify the cast.

Taut line until your top-joint nearly smashes,
  There's danger where the waterweeds grow rank !—
Slack him !—but 'ware another of those brashes !—
  Look out ! he'll slip you if he gains the bank—
Reel him again—quick !—almost spent he splashes—
  Give him the butt, man !—roll him on his flank—
And ere those Titan struggles start afresh,
Pluck from your belt, and ply, the landing-mesh !

Zest of all zests—no Muse can give to me,
  Whose casts are far from Angler Izaak's rite,
Who may not know that tingling ecstasy
  When the three-pounder, fished-for night by night,
Shall never wrench another Wickham free.
  Proudly Jack stands, still flushing from the fight . . .
And lo ! adown the marge of Otter's stream,
Appears the goddess of his journey's dream.

Swiftly she moves ; behind her sweeping skirt,
The kingcups bow : beneath her ample straw,
With loosened curls audacious zephyrs flirt.
She seems a Dryad of the inner shaw ;
Save that arch mouth, disparted, overpert,
Belies the chill of Artemisian law ;
Save that the smiles in azure orbs bewray
The artless damsel of a later day.

Hard at her heels, majestic, deep of jowl,
Ambles forlorn the melancholy Dane,
Whom hawkers hate and tramps that nightly prowl.
From Axwell Kennels by the northern main,
Where the cropped Porthos throats a prizeless growl,
His line is traced through Redgrave's noblest strain.
Though softer limbs may hold romance in fee,
The hound's display the nobler pedigree.

The vole plops bedwards, and the pigeons coo ;
The rushes murmur and the ripples eddy.
Where one head bent before, are bending two,
Above those great gills stiffening already.
Eyes that admire, meet other eyes that woo ;
Hands that would touch, meet other hands unsteady ;
Lips that speak only of a captured fish,
Would fain give utterance to a fonder wish.

The sun is down. The river smooths to glass.
Into the leafy woodlands, dark and cool,
Where hart's-tongue fern and foxglove fleck the grass—
Lover and lass and Monarch of the Pool,
And silver-brindled guardian—they pass.
Dear Alice, thou who lov'dst him yet at school,
Will thy touch still the passions that destroy?
KEE-OW, the prescient peacocks cry, KEE-OY.

CANTO XVIII

Up the broad road that long-dead legions wrought
To blaze their trail across the hedgeless shires.
When first from fort to rampart-guarded fort
The vincula of Cæsar's outpost fires,
Hill-top to hill-top semaphoring, taught
Rome's ordered warfare to our woaded sires;
Ride, in that dewy hour when chores begin,
My hero and his latest heroine.

Smoothly her round throat nestles to the stock;
Under the bowler's brim, each ringless ear
Shows cream atween the brown of twisted lock;
Scarcely her fine foot sways the stirrup-gear,
As lithe hips lissom to the saddle-shock.
Straight-poised, she sits—a Devon huntsman's peer;
And in the shoe-prints of her chestnut steed
Lopes the gigantic brute of Redgrave breed.

Their snaffles jingle challenge to the morn,
The waking ploughman hears their loud hooves clatter.
Past stream and cot and hedgerows of green thorn,
Past glades that echo to the magpie's chatter,
They spur to meet the scented breezes borne
Across wide common-lands where conies scatter,
White scuts a-bobbing o'er the purple heather,
As they go gallopading on together.

Now they draw rein beside some marshy brink
Where, welling upwards from perennial sources,
Gushes a fount for thirsty beast to drink:
Then on anew they urge their eager horses;
Till, tired of tangling herb wherein they sink,
The hound-pads lag and falter on their courses.
Thus they twain come a-riding, skirt to knee,
By leafy sanctuary at Woodbury.

They sit them down upon the sloping sward:
Their tethered steeds stand cropping at the fern:
Prone at their feet, the Dane-dog heaves his ward.
Through aureate haze below them, they discern
The argent streak of Exe Vale, hamlet-starred,
And—mile on mile of cornland, wood and burn—
The known tilth opening, page by harrowed page,
The deep-loamed acres of their heritage.

Westwards and east the skyline curves forsaken;
Never a soul upon the earth but they:
And what to them are eggs that chill, or bacon,
Or cosied coffee on the breakfast-tray,
When their twin hearts, with mutual longing shaken,
Stir to the magic of the growing day?
When her glance dares not face, aglow in his,
The dazzlement of holy mysteries?

One bared hand props the dimple of her chin;
The other rests upon the turf beside him.
Sweet hands—not keen to grasp—as those of sin,
Whose overwhiteness wove the snares that tied him—
But firm, round-wristed, capable, brown skin
Kissed of the sun. If pose do not deride him,
Nor shyness simper for flirtation's sake,
Those taper finger-tips are his to take.

Sudden, he holds them; tender, tentative,
He knows their pressure answer: palm to palm
Touches and lingers. 'Ah, how good to live,
Her hand in his forever!' Now his arm
Ventures her waist: he feels her body give
One tiny thrill of maidenly alarm:
Her eyelids flutter down: his senses swim:
With a contented sigh, she yields to him.

The horses watch them sitting silent there;
  The wise hound gazes, yellow-orbed for pique.
A myriad sun-motes dance upon her hair,
  Dance on the bloom of her averted cheek:
'Alice,' he whispers, 'tell me! Do you care?'
  Her lips are parted, but she may not speak;
For all life's prayers have come to pass with this . . .
At last her eyes meet his . . . and so, they kiss.

EPILOGUE

Hero, farewell! The microbe-muse lies slain,
Slain by the venom of her own attack:
Now to my long-neglected Gods of Gain,
A beggared suppliant I hie me back.
We meet no more, dear first-born of my brain:
Mammon calls citywards!—and yet, ah Jack,
There is a longing, in this soul of me,
To know if Fate has chained or set you free.

Times come, my spirit seems to see you stand,
Bound beyond hope, before the lilied altar;
While the last grains of singleness's sand
Ebb with each solemn sentence of the psalter;
And the packed matrons of the Devon land
Serry their ranks lest you should prove defaulter...
What mean those phantom strains of *Lohengrin*—
Marriage, or memory of elder sin?

Was reformation but another phase ?
  Or did you fare the straight path and the narrow,
To bonded bliss and ordered county ways ?
  Is there now sprung from hero-loins and marrow
An heirling Jack to cheer your riper days,
  And bear the name that Eton flecked—to Harrow ?
Do you hunt foxes and adore your spouse,
Or take the saner view of wedding-vows ?

There is no torch to light the road you went :
  No fairy voice to whisper in mine ears
If cocoa-kisses kept you continent
  Down the long orbit of the sober years ;
Or if you 'scaped from that entanglement,
  In one last poignant scene of tempest-tears
That left my boy ashamed, my Alice wilted ;
Or if she was the jiltress—you, the jilted.

My work is done. Let lesser authors trace
  Their puppets' progress through the trodden field
To Haven-Hymen's trite abiding-place ;
  For others, let the wedding bells be pealed :
You were the dream-child of a little space,
  And, as a dream's, your end is not revealed ;
Though I . . . but there, a poet's speculations
Are boring—boring as his recitations.

FINIS

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